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Cover picture

"Homme au balcon" (1880) is reproduced from *Gustave Caillebotte* by Kirk Varnedoe, which is reviewed on page 1247.

The critic, the mirror and the vamp

Edmund White

KARL BECKSON
Arthur Symons: A life
402pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £35.
0198128827

In the preface to *The Renaissance*, Walter Pater writes, summing up: "What is important, then, is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects." By this standard Pater's disciple Arthur Symons was the most prescient critic of the turn of the century, for he was instinctively drawn to every writer in the England and France of his day who is still read. Although he often laid claim to being systematic in his approach, to the end his writing on art and artists remained somewhat disjointed, as though he could do nothing but alternate admiration with intuition, Pater's biographical and impressionistic methods. He lived well before the era of "close reading", a practice that would have enabled him to demonstrate in detail his enthusiasms. Nor did he know how to look at literature in a mythic light, although Jung's approach to art seems to have been tailor-made to Symons's sensibilities. Symons seldom put his contemporaries into a political, economic or even broadly cultural context, although he could analyse such forces in a distant forebear, as he did in his excellent book on Blake, published in 1907.

Symons knew almost everyone worth knowing. Among his English-speaking friends he included Yeats, Havelock Ellis, Ford Madox Ford, Edmund Gosse, Ernest Dowson, William Michael Rossetti, Joseph Conrad (whose first story he published) and James Joyce (whose early poems and stories he helped to place). By the time Symons was twenty-one he had received the praise of Browning and Pater and the friendly acknowledgement of Meredith. Among his French friends he numbered Renan, Leconte de Lisle, Taine, Rémy de Gourmont and Dumas fils, but his particular intimates and idols were Verlaine and Mallarmé. In his later years Gide and Larbaud visited him in England (he'd met Gide earlier in France).

Symons's strengths – his many ways of rehearsing his enthusiasms, his curiosity and sympathy – come through in his masterful essay on Aubrey Beardsley, first published in

1898 in the *Fortnightly Review* shortly after Beardsley's death. Symons starts off at full tilt, remembering Beardsley at Dieppe haunting the gambling rooms ("He liked the large, deserted rooms, at hours when no one was there; the sense of frivolous things caught at a moment of suspended life, *en déshabille*"). He recalls that at concerts Beardsley was always adding a bejewelled sentence to his unfinished Tannhäuser story, "Under the Hill" ("It could never have been finished, for it had never really been begun").

The tumbling accumulation of insights grows phrase by phrase: "He seemed to have read everything, and had his preferences as adroitly in order, as wittily in evidence, as any man of letters; indeed, he seemed to know more, and was a sounder critic, of books than of pictures; with perhaps a deeper feeling for music than for either." Symons pin-points Beardsley's exact shade of dandyism when he assures us that he "hated the outward and visible signs of an inward yeastiness and incoherence".

Symons had a remarkable knack for affirming the seriousness of what other people dismissed as frivolous, and this gift proceeded more through earnest affirmation than skilled argument, more through revelatory paradox than sustained analysis. He finds Beardsley an artist who "expressed evil with an intensity which lifted it into a region almost of asceticism, though attempting, not seldom, little more than a joke or caprice in line". Similarly, he regards Beardsley as "a satirist who has seen the ideal". Or he proposes that Beardsley is an abstract artist who meditated on real things, someone for whom puff-box, toilet-table and ostrich-feather hat "were the minims and crotchets by which he wrote down his music; they made the music, but they were not the music".

This engaging critic stood in an equally benign relationship to his subject and to his reader. He assumed that both were friendly and that the reader was discriminating but not dismissive, more eager to find something to like than impatient to shrug something off. Symons believes his reader is an aesthete not an intellectual, a hedonist not a student, an amateur of art not a historian of ideas. His amiable assumptions – the same as those animating Virginia Woolf's *The Common Reader* – have now pretty well vanished.

Symons's gusto is his great virtue as a prospector for talent. Like the much earlier French Romantics whom he admired, Symons enjoyed confounding genres and elevating the

so-called minor arts to the status of the major. Of the café singer Yvette Guilbert he could declare, "She is simply a great, impersonal, dramatic artist, who sings realism as others write it." He could also discuss pianists with the sort of seriousness most critics reserve for composers.

Curiously, the very vagueness of his writing about performers throws into relief Symons's own inner conflicts, as though the release from a strict account of his subject allowed him to rave in revealing ways. Thus in discussing the



pianist Pachmann, he at first expresses his desire to be objective and non-programmatic about art: "Pachmann gives you pure music, not states of soul or of temperament, not interpretations but echoes." But a few sentences later, discussing Pachmann's sound, he writes: "You see his fingers feeling after it, his face calling to it, his whole body imploring it. Sometimes it comes upon him in such a burst of light that he has to cry aloud, in order that he may endure the ecstasy." Repressed moralizing returns as ecstatic utterance.

His biographical approach to writers made him particularly good at quick sketches of those he'd known. His favourite, Paul Verlaine, he renders in a few strokes:

He lies back in his corner at the Café François Premier, with his eyes half shut; he drags on my arm as we go up the boulevard together; he shows me his Bible in the little room up the back stairs; he nods his nightcap over a great picture book as he sits up in bed at the hospital.

And his travel writing is some of the most vivid I've ever read, for he simply records what he sees. That his eye was characteristically urban – the eye of Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin – is suggested by a few of his titles: *Cities*; *Cities of Italy*; *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands*; *Colours*; *Studies in Paris*; *Parisian Nights*.

These titles also indicate another preoccupation. In Symons's day the cultural influence of France on England was far more vital than it had been at any time since the eighteenth century. Symons's own poems, which retained traditional forms and kept in all the logical and discursive links of Victorian verse, nevertheless took up the lurid themes of the decadents (self-absorption and the *femme fatale* – the mirror and the vamp). Typically, in the poem "Satiety", Symons writes: "I cannot sin, it wears me. Alas!" Such posing (so at odds with Symons's real puritanism) awakened the full grumbling thunder of Mrs Grundy – one critic denounced his "inexpensive amours", although his friend Yeats told him with more sympathy, "You are a perfectly moral man, but they are the morals of Thessaly." (Behind Symons's back Yeats took a different line. He told Joyce, "Symons has always had a longing to commit great sin, but he has never been able to get beyond ballet girls.")

In response to English moralizing, Symons quite sensibly wrote: "Art may be served by morality: it can never be its servant. For the principles of art are eternal, while the principles of morality fluctuate with the spiritual ebb and flow of the ages." This formulation reveals the quasi-religious role that Symons assigned to art. France served Symons as a counter-example to England in many useful ways. In 1900, for instance, he was able to write, "at least literature in France is not a mere professional business, as so much of what passes for literature is in England, it is not written for money, and it is not written mechanically, for the mere sake of producing a book of verse or prose". Oddly enough, today the descriptions could be reversed, since France has become the country where between serious works writers feel obliged to turn out a *livre de présence*.

The French influence on Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde is well known, but one sometimes forgets that Yeats patterned his notion of

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the poet's priest-like vocation after the example of Mallarmé. And Karl Beckson quotes T. S. Eliot, who called Symonds' best-known book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, "an introduction to wholly new feelings" and "who wrote in 1930:

I myself owe Mr Symonds a great debt, but for having read his book, I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of Laforgue or Rimbaud. I should probably not have begun to read Verlaine; and but for reading Verlaine, I should not have heard of Cournèbe. So the Symonds book is one of those which have affected the course of my life.

In spite of his stated devotion to form, style and technique and his scorn for uplift, Symonds was, nevertheless, haunted by some sort of moral force in literature. If we define "moral" as Henry James might have conceived of it – a dramatic confrontation of personalities, a brilliantly lit staging of choices, a sense of personal destiny lived out under the prestige of religion (despite a deliberate rejection of most of the Christian credo). Or perhaps as John M. Munro (quoted by Beckson) has suggested, Symonds "merely sought intimations of spirituality, early manifestations of a world which lay beyond the senses". Perhaps Symonds might have agreed with Yeats who called the imagination "the philosophical name of the Saviour".

In his introduction to Pater's *The Renaissance*, Adam Phillips contends "It is part of Pater's subtlety to have exploited the invitation of inexact words. His indefinite words, 'sweet', 'peculiar', 'strange', 'delicate', are resonant as blanks that can evoke powerful personal associations in the reader." Certainly this same poetic glow, inviting but unspecified, radiates from much of Symonds' criticism. In Symonds the words are often "strangeness", "exquisite", "strange beauty", and a whole set of paradoxes ("visionary of reality", "tender economy"). Like Ezra Pound, who could find very few reasons beyond the stern, stuttering dictates of his tautly attuned if cranky taste for liking what he liked, Symonds, although vastly less hieratic, championed the artists he was attracted to with an ardent, energetic vagueness. As he wrote in the "Editorial Note" to the first issue of the *Savoy*, "For us, all art is good which is good art."

Karl Beckson's biography, enriched by several newly unearthed caches of letters, is a vivid picture of the man, his era and his contribution to it. Symonds was born in Wales to Cornish parents. At an early age, like a true Decadent, he professed his indifference to nature and his preference for the urban and the artificial and a corresponding urge "to write books for the sake of writing books". He early on evidenced an extraordinary faculty for picking up languages and for assimilating English literature.

By the time he was nineteen, despite his lack of a university education, he'd written an intro-

duction to Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. Two years later he published his *An Introduction to the Study of Browning*. Representative of the acuity of this book is his comparison of a lyric poem by Tennyson with one by Browning: "The perfection of the former consists in the exquisite way in which it expresses feelings common to all. The perfection of the latter consists in the intensity of its expression of a single moment of passion or emotion, one peculiar to a single personality, and to that personality only at such a single moment." Beckson astutely remarks that in such a passage Symonds anticipated Virginia Woolf's "moments of being" and Joyce's "epiphany". The line Symonds takes also has its antecedents in Pater's notion of the "significant moment" and Arnold's of "a great action".

Whereas most admirers of Browning at the time praised his moral profundity, Symonds stressed the method rather than the message and viewed Browning as primarily a dramatic poet. After he met Browning the young Symonds stated that "in the greatest of poets the genius is seen in the man". Too often such a remark is regarded as a simple equation of the life and the work, but Proust, for instance, who devoted so much energy to attacking biographical criticism in his *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, nevertheless recognized no contradiction when he asserted that the largest spirits are the greatest writers and that nothing compares to the friendship of a great writer.

Beckson's central thesis is that Symonds' life falls into two contrasting halves. In 1908, when he was forty-three, Symonds suffered a mental breakdown while travelling in Italy with his wife. He spent the next two years in institutions, incoherent, grandiose and paranoid ("General Paralysis" was the diagnosis of the period). His doctor predicted his imminent death. But Symonds recovered, went on to publish some thirty books (mostly collections of earlier work) and to live on till 1945, when he died at the age of eighty. According to Beckson, before 1908 Symonds was alert to all the trends of his day and an exemplary critic of them all, whereas after his breakdown "his capacity for critical discernment was damaged

permanently by chronic incoherence".

Yeats blamed Symonds' breakdown on his marriage, especially on his wife's extravagance – Yeats claimed she was always dressed up like a "dragon-fly". When Symonds was thirty-three he met the twenty-four-year-old Rhoda Bowser, an aspiring actress from a rich family, and married her in 1901. That very same year, in order to pay for the upkeep of their new flat, Symonds wrote some 100 theatre reviews, for which he earned £5 a week from the *Star*. Money and the scramble to earn it were constant themes in his letters (and in his discussions with Rhoda). When the couple bought a seventeenth-century cottage in Kent, the repairs quickly mounted to £400. As Beckson tells it,

Symonds sought to meet this unexpected burden by undertaking new literary projects: in addition to some thirty-six articles and reviews that he published in 1909, he prepared a new edition of *An Introduction to the Study of Browning* for Dent ("for the sake of £50 on account", he told Hutton), promised to do a history of English criticism "for solid cash" (a project never undertaken), worked on his Blake book, and completed *Studies in Seven Arts* for autumn publication. All of these projects, he told Hutton, would not bring in the £300 or so that he had to pay out in May to cover repairs thus far.

He often rose at 4am to begin his writing day.

Given these mounting worries and continuing pressures, no wonder Symonds collapsed in Venice in 1908 – madness earned him some rest. And it forced Rhoda to start dipping into her own capital (at the time of her death, despite the declining value of her inherited investments, she was still worth more than £43,000).

Beckson's interpretation of Symonds' madness is more ingenious. He argues that Symonds was haunted by his obsession with sin and damnation. His father was a Wesleyan minister. Although Arthur broke away from the faith, the bohemian excesses of his bachelor years in London and Paris tormented him – at least unconsciously. Late in 1893 Symonds became the lover of a ballet-dancer named Lydia, half English, part gypsy. In his passionate affair with Lydia, Symonds, like Tannhäuser, discovered transcendent bliss through sin. As

Symonds put it:

Sin was with us in my rooms; the Flesh was with us always; the Arch-demon arose from Hell whenever I evoked him and certainly my Venus and I came near, night after night, afternoon after noon, hell's mouth. There, after much mad dancing of my senses, I sought and found the Cloven Hill. Alas and alas for the sweet and eternal hell wherein to spend my Eternity in the arms of Venus!

As Beckson concludes, "Lydia's breaking off of the affair early in 1896 'against her will' and his mother's death several months later undoubtedly reinforced Symonds' experience of transgression, rejection, devastating loss, and corrosive guilt." Exactly why this guilt took fourteen more years to surface isn't entirely clear. Of course there's always the possibility that he was suffering from a strictly organic deterioration.

Symonds' character was at once racy and remote. He bragged of his conquests of actresses, of his affair with a snake charmer, and prided himself on being "a scholar in music halls". When he was only twenty-six he was described by George Moore with allegorical facetiousness. Moore saw Symonds as "a man of somewhat yellowish temperament, whom a wicked fairy had cast for his cradle and bestowed on him extraordinary literary gifts in compensation. Virginia Woolf admired his poetry and said of his criticism, 'He has so fine an instance for the aim and quality of each writer that the result seems effortless and brimming with truth.'"

Symonds' exalted notions of art and the artist led him to like Maeterlinck but not Shaw or Ibsen, to prize Debussy but not Ravel, to love Hawthorne and to dismiss the Wordsworth of *The Excursion*, to prefer the Symbolist shadowiness of Gordon Craig's sets to the realism of Sir Henry Irving's. In his essays Symonds frequently quotes Bacon, who wrote: "There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion." Symonds even found an echo of this judgment in Baudelaire's "l'étrangeté, qui est comme le condiment indispensable de toute beauté". Strangeness certainly makes this biography wonderfully delicious.

larmé, but concentrating on the mechanics of the verse. As in his earlier book, this narrow focus is frequently vindicated: the chapters on Lamartine and on the "mercurial" octosyllable in Gautier demonstrate how effectively this approach can aid our understanding. But there are times when Scott's objective founders beneath a prolonged discussion of the exclamations *ô, ah! and ah!* in Laforgue, or in a chapter on "Simile in the Poetry of Wilde and Baudelaire", which turns out to deal solely with the function of the words *like* and *comme* according to their position in the line.

Even so, a narrow focus is much better than none at all. William Calin begins *In Defense of French Poetry* with a complaint that the central tradition of French poetry since the Middle Ages has been disregarded in favour of Romantic and post-Romantic works. This in itself is debatable; there are good reasons, apart from taste, to explain why anthropologists devote more space to nineteenth-century than to medieval verse, and the assertion that there is a general lack of interest in earlier literature overlooks the medieval texts in popular editions, the works of Paul Zumthor and others on medieval poetics, the alternative traditions in contemporary poetry represented by Georges Perec, and more besides.

From his definition of the central tradition, Calin develops a confused polemic, defending the merits of medieval poets, Resistance poets, the Christian tradition and "the motif of the poet-aristocrat". The last he traces from the troubadours, through Charles d'Orléans and René d'Anjou, to the Romantics; doubly ennobling Musset, Hérédia and Baudelaire. There are inevitable anachronisms: in a single paragraph he can describe the Narrator of *Roman de la Rose* as "prudent" and "full of Sartrean bad faith", and refer us to Bergson and Molière. What Calin intends seems to be a rewriting of literary history, which he approaches with a great deal of passion but with no clear idea of his readers or how he expects them to respond to his appeal.

Props and propaganda

Roland Oliver

WILLIAM MINTER
King Solomon's Mines Revisited: Western Interests and the Burdened History of Southern Africa
401pp. New York: Basic Books; distributed in the UK by Harper and Row. £14.95.
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FRED BRIDGLAND
Jonas Savimbi: A key to Africa
513pp. Edinburgh: Mainstream. £14.95.
0906391997

Southern Africa is to British people a thoroughly nebulous concept. South Africa we know. Southern Africa is occasionally used to comprise the Republic, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. North of that, however, we are in Central Africa, of which Lord Salisbury remarked when authorizing the term in 1891, "After all, the Middle Temple is not in the middle." It is not recorded how many seekers after justice have been fooled by the eccentric position of the Middle Temple, but certainly the British misplacement of Central Africa has seriously confused the geopolitics of half a continent. For example, to the north-east of our Central Africa we have East Africa, but what do we have to its north-west? In what region of Africa are Angola, Zaïre, Congo, Gabon and Cameroun, not to mention the accurately named Central African Republic? Lacking an accepted pigeon-hole, these countries tend to fade from our sight, whereas to the Belgians, and increasingly to the French, they are what constitute Central Africa, while Southern Africa includes everything to the south of them. This is surely a more logical categorization than our own.

Seen from across the Atlantic, however, there is an alternative concept of Southern Africa, which embraces the whole of the continent to the south of its western bulge. As the wider framework for the discussion of South African affairs, this concept of Southern Africa has much merit. It includes both the classic areas of white settlement and attempted white rule from Kenya to the Cape, and the most significant areas of mineral extraction from Gabon to the Transvaal. It is the part of the continent where outside investment is largest. It comprises not only the small terrain where Apartheid rules, but also the much larger one in which it has an interest in interfering. All down its western side is the region where the superpowers, through their surrogates, are locked in active conflict, with results which greatly affect the ability of Apartheid to prolong its reign. This, then, is the Southern Africa of which William Minter relates the "burdened history". This is the Africa of which Fred Bridgland describes Jonas Savimbi as the "key".

Minter's *King Solomon's Mines Revisited* is not flawless, but it is well designed, densely textured and, above all, "cool". The author is an American, but there is no trace of American nationalism. He writes with sophistication of British policies past and present. He does not think that the Afrikaners are basically different from any other set of people pursuing their own perceived best interests. Indeed, it is perhaps a fault that he takes his historical background no further back than 1870, and so misses the extent to which the Afrikaner experience was peculiar, and strongly formative of later racial attitudes. Here, it was the relative emptiness of the western Cape that was all important – a veritable land of milk and honey, peopled by Khoisan hunters and pastoralists too weak to resist the encroachment of eighteenth-century Dutch farmers using Exodus as their textbook for penetration and conquest. The Bantu-populated interior was very different, but the ideology of the bridgehead still pervaded the Sunday sermons of the Orange Free State and Transvaal dominions, and created that assurance of representing Christian civilization in a benighted continent which is still the most intractable element in modern Afrikanerdom.

Minter, as his choice of title suggests, is more interested in economics than in ideology, and especially in the mining industry, which by the 1890s had made the Witwatersrand into "the richest spot on earth". This was the glittering magnet, attracting international risk capital

and technical skills, and spreading its influence all over South Africa, which caused Britain to undertake its last and largest-scale war of colonial conquest. It is here that Minter would like to see the origins of Apartheid, and no doubt it is true that industrialization, and the huge increase of white immigration which accompanied it, put a fairly heavy lid on the upward mobility of the more Westernized elements in the African population. Certainly the very wealth and strength of white South Africa by the time of the Boer War made it inevitable that political power should be transferred rapidly into local white hands, which would be the least likely to share it with others. All the same, the Act of Union did not create Apartheid, which was cooked up in the hardline Afrikaner Nationalist camp and sold successfully to a majority of the white electorate only in 1948. Until that time it was assumed that, deep down, South Africa was a member of the same club as other colonial powers ruling territories in Africa, and that any differences in "native policy" were merely ones of "method and timing". After 1948 the chasm opened, with South Africa slamming on the brakes just at the time when Britain, France and Belgium were accelerating hard.

The larger and more original part of Minter's book is concerned with the past thirty years. Of these, the first ten were those in which, to most outside observers, the prospects of fairly rapid change in South Africa looked brightest. These were the years in which the tropical belt of Africa was being decolonized – West Africa in a premeditated way, East Africa more precipitately, and the Belgian Congo with hardly any preparation at all. They were the years in which Britain's last experiment in multiracial constitution-making was visibly failing in the Rhodesias and Nyasaland, and when a million French settlers, who had been brought up to believe that Algeria was a part of France, were finally driven from their homes in North Africa. Of the old colonial powers, only the Portuguese were attempting the course of military repression, and that at a cost which was soon to rise to half the national budget. In the light of all these events, it seemed not unimaginable that South Africa might soon attempt to negotiate with its black subjects.

Had there been any disposition on the part of Free World governments to bring concerted pressure on South Africa, this is when it might just conceivably have been effective – particularly during the few days following Sharpeville. However, as Minter shows, outside governments were still very far from thinking that the South African situation had priority, even among African problems. Britain and France were preoccupied with decolonization elsewhere, and the United States, still a tiro in African affairs, was mainly concerned with fighting the cold war in the ex-Belgian Congo, soon to be renamed Zaïre. Once entered into, through supporting Kasavubu against Lumumba, and then patronizing successively Adoula, Tshombe and Mobutu, Zaïre became the determining factor in United States policy in Southern Africa. For Zaïre led inexorably to involvement in Angola, and to fighting, however covertly, on the same side as South Africa in a war which required South Africa's retention of Namibia as a military springboard.

In fact, it has only been in the past twenty years that Western governments have come under any serious pressure to be seen to be doing something to promote change in South Africa. Of course, philanthropic committees and church groups were attempting to do so earlier, but their influence could never rival that of the skilfully mobilized lobbies of multinational industry and finance, with their unchanging message that economic growth in South Africa would, given just a little more time, be enough to do the trick. But real pressure began only when Independent African governments assumed their seats and made their numbers felt in the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the French Community. On this side of the Atlantic, it is too seldom understood that the independence of tropical Africa unleashed the Black Power movement in the United States, and so exercised a very direct effect on American voters. From this time on, Western governments had to develop views on South Africa which could be expressed in public without raising the dust. "My government", one had to say, "is second to none in

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Poetic appropriations

Robin Buss

CAROL DE DOBAY RIFEIJ
Word and Figure: The language of 19th-century French poetry
206pp. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. \$25.

0814204228
CLIVESCOTT
A Question of Syllables: Essays in 19th-century French verse
215pp. Cambridge University Press. £27.50.
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WILLIAM CALIN
In Defense of French Poetry: An essay in revaluation
208pp. Pennsylvania State University Press. \$22.50.
0271004371

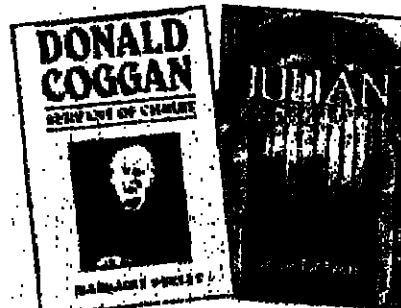
The central concern of Carol de Dobay Rifeij's *Word and Figure* is to examine the use of colloquial or vulgar language by Hugo, Banville, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Rimbaud. The treatment of mundane matters in his elevated language was acceptable in pre-nineteenth-century verse to achieve comic or satirical effects, and Rifeij makes a case for Banville, the least familiar name on her list, as a master of the comic possibilities of "the collision between elevated and familiar diction in poetry". But it is the appropriation of such language by Hugo and his successors for the purposes of "serious" poetry that she intends to highlight, showing how it breaches established conventions and how each poet made this mixing of registers serve his own particular ends.

In nineteenth-century French poetry, "everyday language, far from being neutral, is marked diction set against the standard poetic lexicon". In fact, the broadening of the lexicon to include more everyday words (and discussion of such "unpoetic" topics as food) did not mean abandoning "poetic" terms, though it did allow poets to "nominate" as "poetic" the

nom" as Hugo claimed to have done, rather than searching for periphrases. The impulse was to achieve greater "realism" and "freedom" from constraints, often leading to the charge of "prosaism": Rifeij analyses each of these terms to suggest that both the claims and the criticism have been too readily accepted.

Her discussion of what is meant by the prosaic fails to unravel the different meanings of the term and to deal with changing concepts of the poetic. Many critics in the early nineteenth century believed that contemporary society was essentially hostile to poetry because of its scientific and utilitarian bias, and it was part of the Romantic agenda to disprove this assertion, though that meant accepting some of the premises on which it was based. Rifeij sees Hugo's claim to use "realistic" language as implying a "classical" faith in the coincidence of the word and the object it denotes. But, far from bringing the poem closer to reality, freedom in diction merely expands the figurative potential of its language. Believing that common language is somehow closer to reality, critics have too eagerly accepted the claim that Romanticism is "liberalism in literature", that freedom from poetic constraints is equivalent to freedom in other spheres. From Hugo to Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Rimbaud, Rifeij questions readings of the poetry that associate it with the poet's way of life and, in some instances, his political convictions, and shows that, in each case, the mixing of registers serves diverse but always essentially literary ends.

In *La Vieillesse d'Alexandre* (1978), an essay that relates to the topics of all three books under review, Jacques Roubaud helped to dispel some of the confusion around the notion of freedom in poetry. He was particularly concerned with prosody and metrics, the subject of Clivescott's *A Question of Syllables*, which applies the analytical techniques Scott developed in his *French Verse Art* (1980). The six chapters range over poets from Lamartine to Laforgue and include comparative studies of verse with Baudelaire and Hopkins with Mal-



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0631 144854

both the socio-cultural approach and the more structural explanations, it may well be that Britain's economic weakness is another way of looking at its social strength. Historical continuity and the avoidance of a national catastrophe are supreme benefits. But the fact that neither military defeat nor revolution has destroyed inherited institutionalized interests, also means that modes of organization and behaviour have not been reconstituted so as to provide a more progressive framework for economic activity.

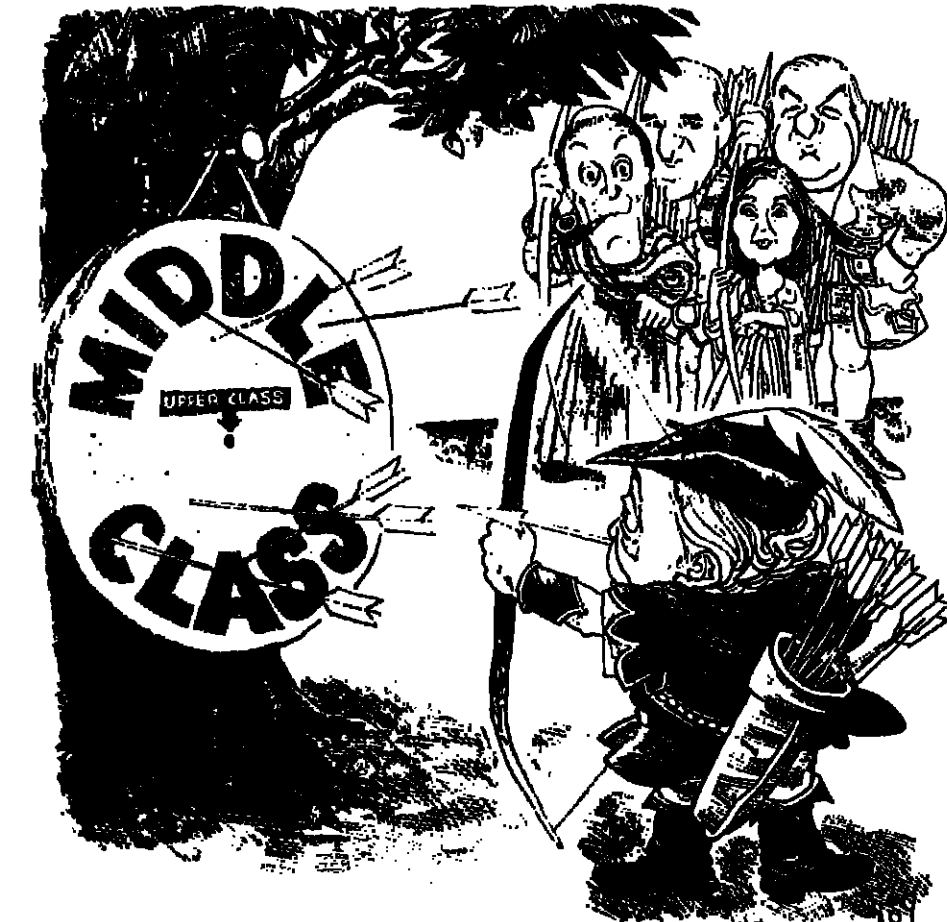
And yet, when all is said, it is still necessary to return to basics and ask whether we really are in a crisis of growth, and therefore whether theories of decline, although reasonable ways of discussing the nation's relative standing, explain too much. After all, the British growth rate has, if anything, accelerated over the long run. We are richer than we ever were, and growing richer all the time – even if at a slower rate than our erstwhile rivals. Why, then, should we be so concerned? One reason is that our national income may not match our social, material and international ambitions. That may indeed be a blow to our self-esteem, but it shows little sign of generating social upheaval. There is also, of course, the distinct possibility that the long-term decline in industrial competitiveness may ultimately undermine living standards if our exports are unable to finance our import needs. But the most serious social consequence of a slow rate of growth is an inability to remedy gross disparities of incomes and life chances.

Slow growth unaccompanied by redistributive measures (from the employed to the unemployed, from the better educated to the children of the less educated, from the well-endowed to the deprived) may aggravate inequality and erode the living standards of large minorities. The British predicament is not only how to become more competitive but also how to ensure that the fruits of the growth which is actually occurring are shared equitably without impeding growth.

Yet in the concern for growth, it may be that we have become too preoccupied with the shrinking of manufacturing industry, even though its proportion of the labour force has fallen from almost 40 per cent to 25 per cent since the early 1950s. The growth of the service industries is often paraded as a triumphant demonstration of the decadence of the British economy. But services have been more important than manufactures for more than a century, and we have been using invisible exports to finance a deficit in the balance of commodity trade for almost two hundred years. Certainly, we shall yet live to be grateful for the boom in capital exports which has taken our net overseas investments from £2.7 billion in 1975 to more than £100 billion in 1987.

It also remains to be seen whether Britain's experience of industrial maturity, like her experience of industrial revolution, will prove to be that of a pioneer rather than of a unique specimen. A decade ago it was fashionable to ask, with Robin Marris, whether "Britain was an Awful Warning to America", or to ponder, with Peter Jay, whether "Englanditis" might be a disease which would affect other Western democracies. We are, after all, dealing with world-wide shifts in the structure of economic activity. Britain may have special problems; but there is no sign yet that we are entirely alone – or that we have yet exhausted the deal of ruin that is in a nation.

General Elections, paradoxically, are the curse of political science. Though on the one hand they furnish regular supplies of fresh evidence for analysis and conjecture, they also have a nasty way of rendering previous conjectures untenable. The trouble is that the electoral



Trog's view of Labour party financial policies just before the General Election of 1974 is taken from Trog: Forty graphic years – the art of Wally Fawkes by Frank Whifford (unnumbered pp. Fourth Estate. £12.95. 0 947795 170).

cycle is too short. With elections every four years there is insufficient time to research, write and publish new anatomies of the body politic unless the writer picks his moment very precisely. He needs to start as soon as possible after one election in order to be published a reasonable time before the next. Neither Stephen Ingle nor Sir James Cable has got it quite right. Though Ingle's book claims to have been revised to take "full account" of the June 1987 election, it was largely completed and was evidently intended for publication before then; while Cable's would better have been held back and its conclusion modified as well. Both authors have been slightly wrongfooted by the result. Neither, it is true, predicted a Labour or Alliance victory, but equally neither expected the further Tory landslide which has been the

overwhelming feature of the political landscape since June. Reading these two books now is a reminder of how unprepared the political world was for a third term of increasingly triumphalist Thatcherism.

Cable's is an unusual, agreeable, modest little book. As a retired ambassador, his viewpoint is that of a professional observer and interpreter of politics who is neither a practitioner nor an academic. He is appropriately lucid, sceptical and, in the end, mildly elegiac. (He concludes with Thatcher begging Americans not to stop coming to Britain after the bombing of Libya – "Please come Not only does it help our standard of living and our economy, but we miss you We love your generosity and we are missing it on our streets" – and contrasts it with Churchill's defiant demand to Roosevelt: "Give us the tools and we will finish the job." "This", sighs Sir James,

Party? "Who are the Conservatives?"; "What is Socialism?"; "Leadership and Organisation in the Labour Party"; "Who are the Socialists?"; followed by a single chapter on the Alliance) Ingle suggests that the party system as it has developed, or rather failed to develop since 1945, has become ossified in a form which no longer reflects the pluralism of contemporary society. This is not a new idea, but it is well rooted in his argument that the two old parties – the Conservatives as much as Labour – continue to be essentially class parties, held back from fulfilling the broader aspirations of their more enlightened leaders by the need continually to flatter and reassure their own particular clientele.

Near the end of his book Ingle comes up with a remarkable quotation from a speech of Lloyd George's in 1910, contrasting the Edwardian Liberal Party's ability to win office with the narrow prospects of the infant and at that time purely sectional Labour Party. Liberalism, Lloyd George contended, harnessed to the assistance of the working class the support of the middle class:

No party could ever hope for success in this country which does not win the support of a large portion of this class . . . and I would strongly urge the importance of this consideration upon those who wish to drive Liberalism out in order to substitute another organisation. You are not going to make socialism in a hurry out of farmers and traders and professional men in this country, but you may scare them into reaction . . . If they are threatened then they will surely sulk and harden into downright Toryism. What gain will that be for Labour?

Though inaccurate as a prediction of the pattern of the next fifty years, this was a wonderfully prescient anticipation of the dilemma that has increasingly confronted the Labour Party since the 1950s and is explicitly faced by Neil Kinnock and Bryan Gould today. By making social progress the exclusive property of a class-based party, Labour has in fact painted itself into a diminishing corner of the electoral market – partly as a result of its own success. Acknowledging his debt to Peter Clarke, Ingle draws attention to the close identity of "new" Liberals and Social Democrats before 1914. It has turned out, exactly as Lloyd George predicted, a misfortune that in the inter-war years that intellectual tradition of non-socialist progressivism allowed itself to become attached – in uncomfortable alliance with neo-Marxists on the one hand and the trades unions on the other – to the Labour Party. The result today is that, as the Labour Party flounders, rent by its own internal contradictions, the Liberal/Social Democratic synthesis of free enterprise with liberal democratic values and collective provision for social needs, finds no credible home within the existing party system, despite offering a political philosophy clearly closer to the views of more of the electorate than those offered by their (respectively clapped-out and opportunist) established rivals. Ingle's book unfortunately went to press before the full extent of the Alliance's post-election disintegration had become clear (though he had an inkling of it). But this latest demonstration of the near-impossibility of putting together a third force capable of breaking the two-party mould – even when one of those parties is patently unable to hold down its side of the see-saw, leaving the country at the mercy of a permanent minority dictatorship – only gives added force to his contention that the present system must eventually, in the interest of representative government, be broken.

"was another time than his.") In a discipline dominated by indigestible textbooks and arcane monographs his book, based on lectures originally given to the International Summer School at Cambridge, is a pleasure to read. Yet sadly one wonders who is likely to read it. Its very unpretentiousness is unlikely to win it a place on university reading lists.

There is no such problem with Ingle's book, which is clearly aimed at politics students. Yet, for an academic book, it too is refreshingly lightly written (though appallingly printed: misprints of proper names include Dennis Healey, William Rogers, Brian Walden).

It also has the advantage over Sir James of arguing a thesis. In a series of clearly structured chapters ("What is Conservatism?", "Leadership and Organisation in the Conservative

News that stays news

Ian Jack

JOHN CAREY (Editor)
The Faber Book of Reportage
239pp. Faber. £14.95.
0571 137164

One of the truisms of a professional reporter's life is that a good story tells itself. This is a rarer occurrence than readers might suppose. All too often reporters find themselves physically remote from the events they must describe, or describing non-events, or complicated events, or events whose relevance to the domestic breakfast-table is obscure. Then comes a familiar crisis over the typewriter. How are the events to be made comprehensible, pertinent, significant or honestly interesting? No obvious narrative presents itself. Which facts (if "facts" are available) should come first? Has the reporter discovered anything new? Will anybody care?

Just occasionally, however, a reporter finds himself or herself in the right place at the right time. He or she has seen something big, possibly elemental, certainly dramatic. And then comes . . . well, here is how Bob Considine began his news-agency dispatch shortly after a world heavyweight contest in 1938:

Listen to this, buddy, for it comes from a guy whose palms are still wet, whose throat is still dry, and whose jaw is still aching from the utter shock of watching Joe Louis knock out Max Schmeling. Schmeling's knock-out is, in fact, one of the happier and more peaceful happenings in John Carey's *Faber Book of Reportage*. As Considine records:

Max fell almost lightly, bereft of his senses, his fingers touching the canvas like a comical stew-burn doing his morning exercises, knees bent and the tongue lolling in his head.

This may not be the ideal way to end one's career, but it is a great deal less pitiful than the fate of thousands of other human beings in this book. Professor Carey begins his selection with Xenophon's retreat to the Black Sea and closes it, almost 300 entries and 2,400 years later, with James Fenton looting monogrammed towels ("they were irresistible") from the presidential palace in Manila a few hours after Marcos and his wife had flown. In the centuries between, suffering is observed at close quarters and death arrives in all kinds of ways: by (to name only a few) beheading, shooting, stoning, drowning, gassing, impaling, burning, bombing and wasting away. There are intervals in the tears and gore. Attila the Hun proves a kindly host, the Japanese are entranced by the sight of their first steam locomotive, man lands on the moon. But the creative and playful aspects of humanity get a poor showing in a book which can find space for six separate accounts of the battle of Waterloo and only half that number for modern sport (the item on cricket describes the violent consequences of bodyline bowling, which may be symptomatic).

What is reportage? Until now it has been (at least for me) no more than a word heard on the lips of leather-jacketed French photographers to dignify the calling others of us know as reporting. Here Carey defines it as description of a real event written by an eyewitness. "Eyewitness accounts have the feeling of truth because they are quick, subjective and incom-

FIFTY YEARS ON

The TLS of November 13, 1937, carried a review of Eud Starkle's *Arthur Rimbaud in Abyssinia*, from which the following extracts are taken:

When George Moore, in the nineties, first drew the attention of English readers to the startling poetry of a youthful Arthur Rimbaud, it was being rumoured in Paris that this most precocious of poets had retired to a monastery on the shores of the Red Sea. The monastic vocation would seem a natural one for a poet disillusioned with the glamour of the literary world; and in fact Rimbaud was then leading, in that inhospitable region, as austere and strenuous a life as if he had been under the rules of one of the severest Orders . . . *Arthur Rimbaud in Abyssinia* is, in effect, a very interesting chapter in the complex story of the partitioning of Africa for in the decade or so that Rimbaud lived there the west coast of the Red Sea, and especially its potential harbours

plete, unlike 'objective' or reconstituted history, which is laborious but dead. "Need the events described matter to the world at large? Carey decides that for the purposes of this collection the quality of writing and observation matter more, on the grounds that "nothing is important – or unimportant – except as it is perceived".

One can quarrel with these criteria; indeed, as Carey acknowledges, many pieces in his book quarrel with them. Plato did not see Socrates die; William of Newburgh was simply repeating rumour when he described the mysterious arrival of two green-skinned children in East Anglia circa 1150; and we must wonder what, if anything, the sailor Richard Whitbourne saw off Newfoundland when he describes a mermaid. Nor are many of the pieces written on the spot ("Rushed reporting can carry the tang of crisis, but it can also be just rushed"). Memoirs and travel books supply some of the most vivid reports, such as Gavin Young's memory of Vietnam, written fifteen years after he had tried to stomach a soldier's pulverized belly with his hands:

He was dying. He fumbled for my right hand – in a futile way, I had been trying to wipe the rain from his face – and pressed it to the warm, liquid mess. I didn't feel the least disgust. I had an idea that between us we might hold him together.

Often it is the random image rather than the scene as a whole which stamps itself on the memory like a branding-iron. The astronaut Edward Aldrin describes mankind's first smell of the moon: "pungent, like gunpowder or spent cap-pistol caps". Gustave Flaubert notices that he has stained the divan during a *coup* with an Egyptian whore. W. H. Davies loses a foot under a train and puffs away on his pipe while awaiting a doctor. Richard Hillary parachutes from his fighter into the Channel, terribly burnt, and floating there observes that "by closing one eye I could see my lips, jutting out like motor tyres". While in the same war, at a makeshift mortuary in London, Frances Faviell reassembles blitzed corpses: "It became a grim and ghastly satisfaction when a body was fairly constructed – but if one was too lavish in making one body almost whole then another would have sad gaps."

Images such as these combat what Carey calls "the power of language to muffle the vivid, the frightening or the unaccustomed" so that we can see people "gazing incredulously at what was, for the moment, the newest thing that had ever happened to them". His introduction is itself a model of unmythified language and touches on several important questions about the advent of mass communication ("the greatest change in human consciousness that has taken place in recorded history") and the way that "news" has become a substitute for popular fiction in many people's lives. But he goes astray, I think, when he sets up a kind of contest, reportage versus imaginative literature, and concludes that reportage "exiles us from fiction into the sharp terrain of truth". The great realistic novelists of the last century borrowed its techniques, says Carey, but at best produced only "imitation reportage" which lacked a vital ingredient: "the simple fact that the reader knows all this actually happened".

Of course, yes. But what Carey overlooks is that much modern reportage borrows tricks from imaginative literature. This is not to say

it makes things up (though it does – Bob Considine's jaw, for example: was it really agape when he started to bash away at the portable?), but that it uses devices such as plot, character and dialogue to force a pattern on often shapeless events. And not least in the process of characterization is the character of the reporter himself. How is he to see things – compassionately, ironically, with or without detachment? Carey writes: "The writers [of the best reportage] are strangers to omniscience . . . the good reporter must cultivate the innocent eye but he must not be innocent . . . he must be Experience simulating Innocence." This is a tall order and many of us fail to deliver it. But for those who succeed, and carry on succeeding through war, flood and famine, it seems reasonable to suspect that a simulation of attitude might eventually lead to an invention of self.

All in all, this is a chastening book for a professional reporter, because most of the truly memorable passages in it come from unfortunate participants rather than paid observers. These are people not so much in the right place at the right time as the wrong place at the wrong time – on the Titanic or in Belsen – proving (though how they must wish they could not) that observation is no substitute for participation when it comes to preserving the record of human suffering. For me, the single most powerful piece is Fanny Burney's brave account of her mastectomy. No anaesthetic, both the patient and the doctor jangling with nerves, pre-operation advice that screaming may help:

when that dreadful steel was plunged into my breast – cutting through veins-arteries-flesh-nerves – I needed no injunction not to restrain my cries. I began a scream that lasted unintermittently during the whole time of the incision – and I almost marvel that it rings not in my ears still.

Why are we so absorbed by such horrors? Carey suggests that in the modern West reportage fills religion's old role; not as a faith or creed, but as a permanent backdrop which gives modern man "a habitual daily illusion of communication with a reality greater than himself". Just as religion supplied mankind with an answer to death – the promise of life hereafter – so reportage, through its enduring obsession with catastrophe, unconsciously stresses the reader's or viewer's own survival to give us a comforting sense of immortality.

This is a persuasive argument for the popularity of the *Nine O'Clock News*, but it does not explain why, in Carey's phrase, reportage "naturally gravitates" to death or cruelty in the first instance, and was gravitating to it even when religion gave most people a balm and an answer to the biggest of questions. Couldn't the real reason for our fascination be more basic?

One of Carey's more idiosyncratic selections is an extract from J. R. Ackerley's diary, in which Ackerley recounts a rabbiting expedition with a ten-year-old boy. Their dog catches a rabbit and starts to savage it in a bush. Ackerley writes that the effect on the boy was "most interesting".

He almost had hysterics. He was quite over-wrought. "No, No, Oh, look, look. Let me. Let me. There it is. Oh, stop it, stop it" – all that kind of exclamation: he tried to rush into the bush, jumped about, began to cry, pulled himself together, and every now and then darted back to the bush again.

Carey says he included this small incident because it shows how one young male "began to be acclimatised to killing" and is therefore germane "to all the massacres and atrocities this book logs". But doesn't it also reveal that the suffering of others, besides exciting compassion and repulsion, arouses in us a congenial curiosity that amounts almost to attraction? And that reportage (and *The Faber Book of Reportage*) exist at least partly to satisfy this compulsion? "Oh, look, look . . . Oh, stop it, stop it", we say with Ackerley's boy as we turn the pages, and come across Mary Queen of Scots's head hanging from her neck by a piece of gristle, or encounter the bodies which stubbornly refused to stay buried in the trench walls at Gallipoli. "Hands were the worst", wrote Leonard Thompson, a farmhand fresh from Suffolk; "they would escape from the sand, pointing, begging – even waving! There was one which we all shook when we passed, saying 'Good Morning' in a posh voice. Everybody did it."



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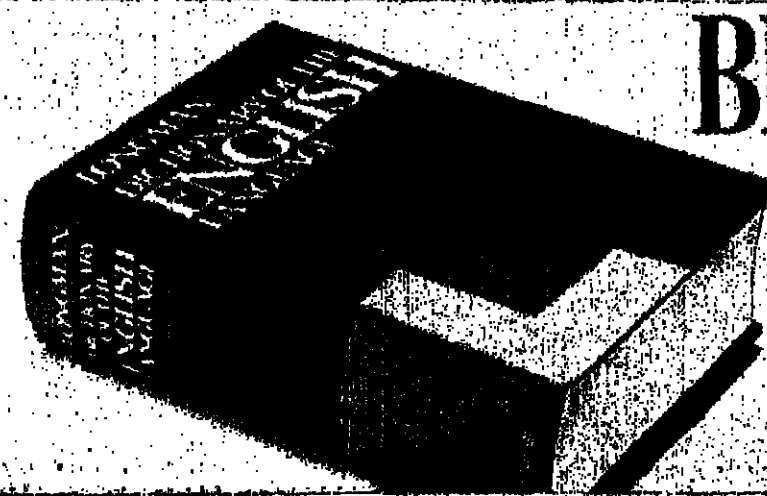
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Rawul progress

Anne Duchêne

RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA
Three Continents
384pp. Murray. £11.95.
0719544335

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's new novel is long, with a very large title. It is not really about three continents. Most of it takes place among the same people, indoors, or in conditions of peculiar isolation. This is fitting, as it is a story about degradation, which requires a concentration of means and effects. Insistent hunters of symbols may try matching the plot with the movement from America, continent of hope, through London, in a muddled continent, shakily propped-up, to India, continent of loss, immense and featureless, where distinctions become difficult to make; but only India here justifies these rather threadbare categories. (In India, the narrator can watch her beloved brother kicking a defenceless man, and *ratanahar*—this without shock.) Nothing and nobody sounds particularly American, and the London of hotels and hired rooms might equally be New York.

The narrator, Harriet, is a young American, soon to inherit a fortune, shared with her twin, Michael. At eighteen (the book spans three years), Michael and Harriet are idealists, untempted by the opportunities offered to scions of a long line of patrician public servants. Michael scours the world, in search of an idea worth living for; Harriet waits at home, in passionate sympathy.

The story begins when Michael returns not only with an idea but with the raffish crew attached to "the Rawul", an Indian prince of what the blurb succinctly calls "a dubious title and a small derelict kingdom". The Rawul is initiating a world peace mission, based on what he calls "the Fourth World". This naturally requires a good deal of funding.

Harriet, like Michael, falls in love with the idea, and – even more than Michael – with Crishi, the Rawul's native and ambiguous henchman, of apparently inexorable charm. The author plays her cards openly, and never presents Crishi as anything but a monster of kaleidoscopic falsehood. When, for obvious reasons, he marries Harriet, we have to accept the premise that Harriet falls under his sexual thrall into a condition of hebeteude.

The rest is a long, detailed, painful downward spiral, over which the story-teller throws

her customary iridescent veils, to embrace an almost self-indulgently large cast of characters, not all of whom seem very interesting or relevant. On the side of the innocents, as it were, one remembers the twins' stately grandfather, and his ex-mistress, now wife, who becomes the epitome of loyal agitation; and on the opposing side – the Rawul's infinitely dependable self-esteem making him almost a Micawber innocent – Rani, or Renee, his consort, whose relations with Crishi are darkly *lunche*, but whose anxieties, like his, are those of a slightly unsteady international crook.

The major characters, certainly, are concrete and particular enough to quell any idea of satire, however sad, on the tendency of Western youth to become bemused by putative Eastern wisdom (though when in London the Rawul's mob take over a house where a previous world leader, Babaji, is dying upstairs – attended by his last two acolytes, kindly middle-aged Englishwomen in saris and cardigans – there does seem some suggestion of a world littered with discarded gurus). Michael and Harriet, by comparison, seem bleached and conventional. Michael – put in charge of the Rawul's para-militaries – does begin to question, though not soon enough. Harriet never questions, but moves from naïveté to almost morose acquiescence. The hinge of the story depends on her total sexual infatuation – a premise which may try the patience, even the credulity, of many readers – and though the author only modestly adumbrates her sexual submission, the whole notion does compound the rather dangerous confusion between the observant authorial voice and Harriet's dulled responses.

It says much for the writing, which at first is almost universally bland, that in the final Indian section it quickens to a climax of horrifying, almost ludicrous suspense. Will Harriet come to her senses a few days before she is twenty-one? Will she sign away her fortune to what she knows to be a criminal crew? Will she be in time to save Michael? All answers in the very last chapter.

This seems an oddly negative book, from a writer celebrated for her warmth and generosity. Possibly for once she wanted to be warm and wicked – wicked, that is, because without hope, as well as without mercy. Not for us to gain any such experiments. If indeed, though, she did wish seriously to say something about the ease with which the people of "three continents" may nowadays corrupt each other, then the very wealth and weight of detail seem to have overwhelmed the intention.

Dublin die-hards

Patricia Craig

ELIS DILLON
The Interloper
250pp. Hodder and Stoughton. £10.95.
0340 406690

Elis Dillon's new novel, historical for the most part, opens in the early 1970s with a meeting between two Irish Civil War veterans, one returned from America for a last look at the old country, the other ensconced in a poky cottage in the Dublin mountains. Their association goes back to 1920, with Ireland in the throes of the Black and Tan war, one of the two – the narrator, Michael D'Arcy – on the run, and the other, his Comauntant, Paul Dunne, arriving at his hideout with orders for him and his companions. Dunne is impassive and fanatical by temperament. D'Arcy conceals his dislike of Dunne out of natural good manners at first (he is the son of a big house in Connacht, a republican by conviction, not hereditarily), and later out of a wish to remain close to Pamela, the object of his deepest affections, whose own heart is given unaccountably to Dunne. Pamela is English and upper-class, but has espoused the republican cause, and frequently visits Dunne, a wanted man, at a house on the outskirts of Dublin.

Eventually, D'Arcy gets Pamela to himself in a tumble-down mansion not far from Dublin and an idyllic interlude ensues, with the two of them playing house like a pair of newlyweds. Pamela's obsession with Dunne is temporarily pushed aside. D'Arcy, though a member of the

faction that opposes the Treaty, has been growing disillusioned with extreme republicanism for some time, partly on account of the brutalizing effect of guerrilla warfare, which he has observed at first hand. He finds himself impelled towards an act of betrayal, among whose causes is one of the oddest in Irish historical fiction: a wish to spare Pamela the necessity of having to explain to Dunne how she comes to be pregnant.

The Interloper tells a romantic story, but fortunately there is more to the novel than this. As ever, Dillon is at her best when dealing with Ireland's vicissitudes, and here she offers a description of political events just before and after the signing of the Treaty, a time when the conflict between republican and Black and Tan was superseded by that among republican and Free Stater. D'Arcy is among the die-hard defenders of the Four Courts. Rory O'Connor and Liam Mellows, both executed later that year (1922) by an Irish firing-squad, put in an appearance, urging full commitment to a full-scale republic. So too does Michael Collins: his convictions and his fate continue to make compelling topics. It is hard not to feel that these impersonal matters are of more consequence than the emotional fulfilment with which Elis Dillon has burdened her three main characters. When it comes to the emotional plot – smoothly recounted, and full of a kind of dignified regretfulness – there is even a touch of anachronism here and there, as when Pamela, serenely confronting the prospect of unnamed motherhood, remarks that attitudes towards this condition have changed. In 1922, in Ireland, they hadn't.

Dissenting settlers

Anthony Sattin

DENIS HIRSON
The House Next Door to Africa
99pp. Carcanet. £9.95.
0856357310

The opening of Denis Hirson's first novel presents a domestic world of aunts and uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers, and even one great-grandmother – Dvorah – who likes to believe that she is on the train back to Russia.

This view of the world is a child's, particular, partly-perceived, and complete only in its acquiescence. The opening – the unnamed narrator is a young child – is delivered as a series of briefly remembered incidents or neatly shaped family legends which recount, for instance, how Grandpa Zalman left Minsk after the First World War and met Granny Toba in Palestine. He remembers the whole family at work picking and preserving apricots. His aunt Essie can remember nothing about Russia except waving a white handkerchief at it as she sailed away.

Had the family settled in the United States, their story might have been propelled by an internal dynamic. Since the novel is written by a South African and the fictional family choose to settle in Johannesburg, it is the outside world that threatens them most. When the unnamed narrator is at university, he and 356 other civil rights protesters are held for a day by the police. This is described as an unexpected event, however, and the episode ends

with: "Back home there is mutton stew and fruit salad for supper." Earlier, on his thirteenth birthday, he had been allowed a special visit to his father, a prisoner of the State for little more – it seems – than having an enthusiasm for all sorts of books. There is no longer anything normal or ordinary about this white middle-class family, although they appear to be neither radical nor dangerous.

The House Next Door to Africa is written in the context of current events in South Africa and is a novel of protest, although not in the more strident manner of (for example) Breyten Breytenbach, whose poetry Denis Hirson has translated. Hirson's own narrative technique is less successful when approaching history and politics than when it explores the private world of personal history and individual experience. It achieves great power in suggesting the movement of the narrator's family from immigration to dissent, although the implication that exile is the solution to the dilemma faced by whites opposed to apartheid and the denial of civil rights might be simplistic.

Hirson avoids continuous narrative; and the brevity of the novel's episodes and memories, and the sketchiness of its characters, adds to the book's sense of insecurity and suits the subject-matter. This is counterbalanced by some beautiful, calm and evocative descriptive passages. The novel is slight, and at times seems limited by its perspective, but this is an accomplished debut and gives serious consideration to some of the problems within South Africa which should be continuously before an international audience.

Grabbing at freedom

Deborah Singmaster

ITADALY
A Singular Attraction
144pp. Cape. £10.95.
0224024388

Ita Daly's second novel, like her first, *Ellen*, is set in Dublin. On the evening of her mother's funeral, Pauline Kennedy marches out of her family home. Her brothers, now living in England, are outraged when she announces that she is not going to keep on the house as a shrine to the past and convenient holiday base for their children. But Pauline, no sentimentalist, grabs at her freedom – a freedom which she fears may have come twenty years too late. She is thirty-eight and, in her own eyes, a freak because she is still a virgin. What she wants from her new life is not marriage or romance, but "technical assistance", to rid her of this unwanted encumbrance which reminds her of her mother's chaise-longue, prized at first but with the passing of years, unwanted and increasingly difficult to dispose of. Ironically, she is surrounded by pregnancies: her friend Una is expecting twins, and Marie, a pupil at the school where she teaches, asks her for money to procure an abortion; Pauline provides sym-

pathy but refuses the money. Pauline's new neighbour, Jens Hansen, an ineffectual Danish businessman, seems to offer a possible solution to her problem and their relationship shuffles cautiously towards its unsatisfactory and unconvincing conclusion. Although Pauline's involvement has been more than merely "technical", she emerges from the affair serene and assured, an achievement one attributes to her lack of emotional depth and imagination rather than self-discipline. It is the peripheral characters, Una with her joyless marriage and the teenage Marie, confronted by her parents' bigotry, who suffer in this novel, not the emancipated Pauline. The only contented figure encountered briefly in its pages is the childless cockney widow, Maisie, who kicks her husband's tombstone whenever she becomes dissatisfied with life; given the unattractiveness of the men in Daly's novels, this would seem to be the most satisfactory form of contact with the opposite sex open to her women.

Ita Daly writes concisely and achieves her effects with minimum elaboration. There is an excellent sketch of a rain-soaked holiday in Kerry, but Dublin itself, so memorably evoked in *Ellen*, is only a flat backdrop here. Both novels are of identical length, yet the earlier *Ellen* packs a richer, stranger world into its 144 pages than this low-keyed successor.

Fugitive blues

Brian Morton

ALAN PLATER
Misterioso
197pp. Methuen. £10.95.
0413133800

When Rachel's mother is killed in a car crash, she leaves behind one unsuspected secret. Simple arithmetic and a handful of diary entries reveal that the man Rachel knows as her father only appeared on the scene three months after her conception. Her "real" father is a shadowy figure, a jazz musician, addicted to sudden disappearances and to one particular. The notorious Monk tune "Misterioso" is a remarkable, fugitive blues, built up in ambiguous sixth, the perfect theme for a personal quest in which resolution recedes in exact proportion to the rate of discovery.

Rachel manages to track her father down to a last drive – the Club Mayday, naturally, which he runs in Paddington. Learning to talk

jazz rather than Mahler takes a little time; it takes longer to come to terms with the fact that the shrugs and verbal mannerisms that overlay her Yorkshire accent have a specific racial origin; it turns out to have been her grandparents' casual antisemitism that kept her mother and (real) father apart.

Paul bides any sense of loss he might feel behind a brittle humour that would be stronger and more convincing but for the fact that every character – in London and Yorkshire alike – seems addicted to one-liners. The effect is closer to Frederic Raphael than to Plater's usual chunky work. This, though, is an altogether more serious venture than his recent jazz-based fiction *The Beiderbecke Affair* and *The Beiderbecke Tapes*, which succeeded better as screenplays than as novels.

In the last of a monthly series, the *New Fiction Magazine* contains stories by Paul Binding and Thelma Wheatley, and articles by Anne Chisholm, Paul Taylor and Barbara Hardy. In future, the magazine will appear quarterly.

Reviewing from the edge

John Clute

CYNTHIA OZICK
The Messiah of Stockholm
144pp. Deutsch. £9.95.
02398142 X

In the middle of winter, in a city "smouldering at the northernmost margins of the Industrial West", lives a forty-two-year-old book reviewer in a rented room. His last marriage is a thing of the past. He is an orphan. His very name is arbitrary. As is the case with so many Scandinavian males, his countenance is younger than his years, but unformed, dejected. He seems to have been passed by. Like Stockholm itself, he seems marginal.

The books (translations of which he reviews) come almost invariably from the hot innards of Central Europe, and date, preferably, from before the outbreak of the Second World War. He is drawn to authors like Elias Canetti, or Witold Gombrowicz, attempting to warm his chilled spirit in the cauldron of their apocalyptic Modernism; but to Bruno Schulz – the Polish writer killed by the Nazis in 1942 – he is more than merely drawn. Bruno Schulz, he has

come to believe (in his state of extremity at the edge of the world), was his father.

The Messiah of Stockholm, Cynthia Ozick's third novel, is a fable of belatedness, or of forgery, which turns out to be much the same thing. His obsessions have led "Lars Andemening" to reveal his claimed parentage to Heidi Eklund, herself a refugee from the European apocalypse, and through her he is exposed to a manuscript which may be that of *The Messiah*, Schulz's last work. But it may be a forgery, just as the woman who brings it to him, and who herself claims to be Schulz's daughter, may be an imposter.

Winter continues to darken, and snow covers the cold world. When "Lars" finally confronts the manuscript, which is a contorted *mélange* of images concerning "creation and redemption", he finds himself unable to remember more than a vague impression of what he has read. Faced with the realities he had longed to inhabit, or even with a forged version of those realities, he becomes as blank as Stockholm in December. In the dark finissterre of European culture, there is nothing left for "Lars" of the primary radiance of "the original of things". Because the amnesia of his condition obliterates that radiance, there is no point

Irrelevant finesse

Tina Brown

CHARLES SIMMONS
The Belles Lettres Papers
175pp. Secker and Warburg/Alison. £10.95.
0436464896

In the era of the Big Book, few American novelists have the courage to be slight. Literary earnestness is so intense, it's almost unpatrician to want to be "amusing". It's certainly deeply un-American; which is why Charles Simmons's spoof of the world of book-reviewing is such a curiosity. And Simmons strives not only to be amusing; he is satisfied with nothing less than fine irrelevance.

The action takes place in the office of *Belles Lettres*, a literary magazine that lost its hyphen in 1960. The narrator is a sound young assistant editor, Frank Page, whose role is to try to pilot his good-egg editor Jonathan Margin through the storm of progress unleashed by the visionary commercial stewardship of Cyrus Tooling. He falls and Margin is replaced by Newbold Press, an editor as crass as his proprietor. In the end, Press is brought down by succumbing to a hoax discovery of some Shakespeare sonnets that prove the Bard was gay.

It's a weak dénouement and one wishes that, in general, Simmons had been a bit more inventive with the plot. At first it seems as though this might be another *Scoop*, or a liter-

ary *Billy Liar*, but Simmons is too easy with himself; comic names are always a bad sign and there is a rash of them here, most of them derived from typography and publishing.

By far the best part of *The Belles Lettres Papers* is the opening chapter, which traces the pedigree of the magazine from rich man's plaything under Aubrey Buckram to media property under Cyrus Tooling, and sketches the lineage of editors. The worthy idealist Samuel Serif gives it a faltering start; the visionary Xavier Deckle launches it into the literary stratosphere; the humdrum professional Effie Backstrip (beloved by the publishing world as "a real bookman") consolidates the success; flaming wunderkind Skippy Overleaf rocks the boat; and the sane gentleman-hack Jonathan Margin returns the pendulum to dead centre. "Unlike Backstrip, he was a literary bloke. Unlike Overleaf he was not a wonderchild." Names apart, the sequence is litcom at its most authentic.

When Simmons takes aim at the ruthlessness of corporate culture he seems about to develop a more telling satire. In the scene where Margin reveals he has been fired, he says to Page:

Thank you, Frank, but I won't need help. When a corporation has humiliated one of its own, it tends to let him be. It's not that the corporation has a heart. It's that it feels it has implanted a yeasty little lump of self-hatred that will grow and eventually turn the fellow into a crank and everyone will understand why the fellow had to be humiliated in the first place.

Sickening for something

Helen Fensome

LESLEA NEWMAN
Good Enough To Eat
249pp. Sheba. Paperback, £4.95.
0907179436

Good Enough to Eat, spans a fortnight in the life of Liza, who is twenty-five and who suffers from Bulimia Nervosa. Leslea Newman convincingly describes the illness and its ramifications, weaving into her story questions of Liza's self-image, her relationships with her parents and her sexuality.

The novel opens in a restaurant where Liza is having dinner with Michael, who both bores and disgusts her (boredom, like disgust at eating and at male sexuality, recurs throughout the first part). Her first sexual encounter with Michael is credible, but the second is far less so, seeming too much like the fantasy of a vindictive, man-hater, as she and her gay intimate Harvey ridicule Michael with a barrage of invective when he is caught, literally, with his trousers down.

In the second part of the novel Liza sets out to explore the world of women-only. She becomes infatuated with Anemone, whom she meets in the street and who facilitates her in-

itiation into this new world, helping her to overcome her trepidation and bewilderment. Liza rapidly reconstructs all her past relationships as pointing to her latent homosexuality; and while the knowledge that Anemone and her friends also suffer from eating-related problems comes as a shock, it paves the way for her rethinking of her perceptions of herself and others. As the two women become lovers there are hints at a dramatic resolution of all Liza's greatest difficulties; she begins to see what her true needs are and to experience them being met.

In a preface, Newman claims that *Good Enough to Eat* explores the recovery process from Bulimia. In fact, this is something of an overstatement, as Liza's underlying conflicts and anxieties are not explored in any depth. Newman runs together Liza's actual speech and her internal dialogue to expose in clear relief the discrepancy between what she articulates and what she keeps unsaid. But those strands which relate to a feminist understanding of the illness and its possible "cure" are concentrated on at the expense of other, equally fundamental, issues. Leslea Newman is successful, though, in illustrating the symbolic place of food for Liza and her novel portrays something of the confusion of eating with sexuality, and skillfully suggests factors which may have caused the illness.

Wierdness

Roz Kaveney

IAIN BANKS
Espedair Street
249pp. Macmillan. £10.95.
0333449169

One half of Iain Banks's fictional memoir of a grieving, obsessed bass-guitarist is set firmly in the debatable ground between the cynical arrangement of popular-cultural clichés and the skilful deployment, in new and more evocative patterns, of those references shared by at least the clerisy of a culture. Here, where Sunset Boulevard meets Penny Lane, Banks's hero Wierd's recollections take off. There are a limited number of variations on the traditional occupational hazards: heroin, electrocution, demolished hotel rooms and Bible belt burnings, but to his credit Banks sticks with making minor changes to well known stories. He trusts his material, using it to show the musings of his hero as the cracker-barrel sentiments they are, and, in order to remain plausible, have to be.

In other sections of the novel, Banks shows himself entirely in command of teenage embarrassment as young Davy Wierd escapes from his impoverished family home to persuade the clean-cut middle-class adolescents of Frozen Gold that they need his gawky, wistful songs and clumsy presence; and of a complex of male guilt and desire as the Wierd of the present becomes embarrassedly protective of his prostitute mistress. Mostly, though, he exploits for wild force the singer's attempt to return to his roots. Descriptions of drinking bouts and night-club brawls are set-pieces that Banks feels more at home with, perhaps, than the coke-sniffing and concert tours. What holds these various elements together is Banks's commitment not only to his portrait of an artist but to a sense that all of this matters, that a platinum disc is worth at least as much as the Booker.

Unfortunately, Simmons takes this promising insight no further, opting instead for easier targets and tactics – mixing the names of real authors like Norman Mailer and John Updike with his own comic cast, for example, to abet the controversial whiff of *roman à clef*.

The Belles Lettres Papers is, on the whole, a droll disappointment. The revelations as well as the satire are simply too polite – rather as if Mr Pooter had written *Answered Prayers*. When it appeared in the United States it caused a small stir and Simmons resigned his job on the *New York Times Book Review* shortly afterwards. A slight satisfaction. Or perhaps a little lump of yeast.

ART HISTORY

Manet's
Contemplation
at the Gare
Saint-Lazare
by Harry Rand

This is a fresh and sensitive examination of one of Manet's best-known paintings (*The Gare Saint-Lazare*, known in some places as *The Railway or The Railroad*) and of his correspondence with French poet Stéphane Mallarmé. It yields not only a new symbolist interpretation of the style and structure of the painting but gives new insight into Manet's concerns and intentions as a painter. £29.95

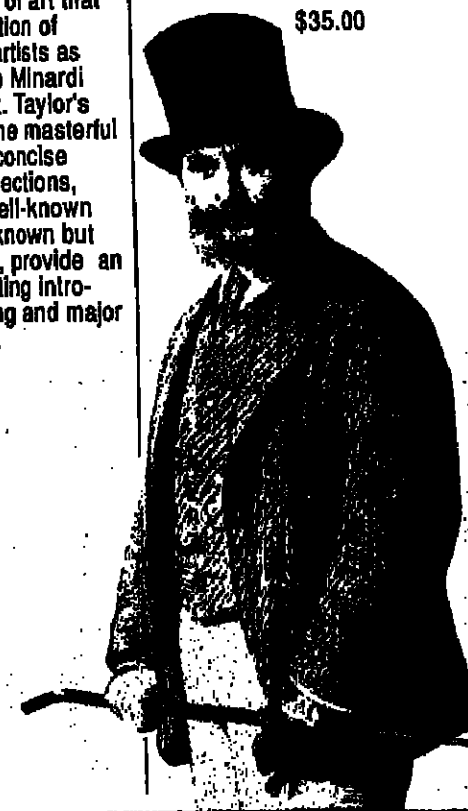
The Dreyfus
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Edited by
Norman L. Kleeblatt

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Nineteenth-
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Edited by
Joshua C. Taylor
This unique and extraordinarily rich collection of writings by late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century artists and critics offers a thematic approach to understanding the multilayered theories of art that illuminated the direction of nineteenth-century artists as diverse as Tommaso Minardi and Georges Seurat. Taylor's introductions combine masterful analysis and clear, concise writings, and the selections, which range from well-known documents to little-known but wonderful surprises, provide an original and stimulating introduction to an exciting and major period in art history. \$38.50

Looking
Into Degas
Uneasy Images of Women
and Modern Life
by Eunice Lipton
Lipton looks beyond Degas' pretty pictures, probing with exciting new vision the world from which they were made. She argues that Degas' paintings actively carry and create meaning and that issues of class, sex, and work resonate in these works. \$35.00



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Exemplary lives

Robert Skidelsky

Biography has never been so widely read, and never have the rewards for writing it been so spectacular. Yet its intellectual reputation is as suspect as ever. The most human and accessible of the non-fiction genres, it is read partly, at least, for gossip. But biography has tried hard to make itself into an academic discipline. There are theories about how to do biography and who to do biography about, about how personality relates to achievement, about how different bits of personality relate to each other, and so on. There is even a learned journal, *Biography*, based in Hawaii.

Most British biographers have shunned these theories without, however, discovering a convincing justification for what they are doing. Bernard Crick has come nearest. In his biography of Orwell, he explained that a biographer can't look into "Orwell's mind"; that the only evidence he has is of behaviour, that he should not try to fill gaps in his evidence with surmise; and that the only life to be written about is the actual life actually lived. In other words, biography is simply telling the story of a life. The trouble is that we have lost the confidence to tell such stories well. Too often bad theory has ousted good story-telling.

The decline of the story-telling function of biography really started in Victorian times, when it was felt that the great had to be protected from the prying eye of the vulgar. So we got the whitewash mode of biography. This was followed by the debunking mode of the Georgians. They wanted to show that the first World War was caused by false values. Their mode, particularly in the hands of a master like Lytton Strachey, was subtle denigration. Somewhere along the way this clash of creed got confused with an argument about the degree of reticence or frankness appropriate in biography, in which the important influence was Freud. Biography came under the influence of psychoanalysis, not so much in the narrow sense, as that sexual frankness was seen to be necessary to truthful story-telling. Sexual irregularity came to be seen by many biographers as something which added to, rather than detracted from, the stature of their subjects; even more, as something which explained their stature.

The second thing which went wrong with modern biography was its increasingly reductionist character, itself an offshoot of positivist philosophy. Freud trained the biographer to see not what was, but the cause of what was. The biographer no longer portrayed life, he explained it. His pages were filled with chimeras: the real action took place in the unconscious; or if you were a Marxist, in the class struggle.

Freudianism also provided theories about the connections between the personality and the achievement. The attempt to explain achievement in terms of personality has, in

fact, become the central justification of biography. I have often used it myself, though always with disquiet about the vagueness of the language in which the claim is made. The statement that the life of an outstanding person "illuminates" his or her work now strikes me as extremely unilluminating. In what way does knowledge of Einstein's life illuminate the theory of relativity, or knowledge of Picasso's love-affairs help us appreciate his paintings? Is my appreciation of a Verdi opera or an argument by Wittgenstein deepened by any knowledge of the circumstances of the lives of these gentlemen? I am now persuaded that any justification of biography along these lines is bound

"The only way biography can recover its main function . . . is to go back to its roots. These roots lie in ancestor worship."

to fail. Indeed, it is an affront to claim that one can understand any mental or aesthetic or political event except in the terms of the event itself. Any postulated connections which require an argument by the biographer now seem to me to be suspect.

It goes without saying that there are good biographies in every period, irrespective of the theories which inspire them. But the only way biography as an undertaking can recover its main function of good story-telling is to go back to its roots. These roots lie in ancestor worship. Ancestors were - in many parts of the world still are - sources of identity, of wisdom, of encouragement. Tales of famous ancestors were ways of establishing family claims to position; of bringing relevant testimony to bear on problems of living; of generating pride in a community's achievements.

There has always been a dynastic aspect to biography. Families continue to bask in the reflected glory of a famous ancestor. A family name like Churchill or Keynes not only can give direction to the lives of its bearers, but can also establish a claim to a certain kind of consideration. This was more important in the past than it is today, but it is still a factor in the business of biography. The reputation of the name is still of interest to families; and those with famous ancestors are prepared to control the use of the name. (Indeed, one could argue that biographical property has grown more important to families as other forms of inheritance have ceased to confer distinction.) The way a family's name is kept in good standing is partly at least by controlling stories about its forebears. The biographer's most important contract is thus not with his publisher but with the family, and concerns the uses to which he is entitled to put the family name; a contract which can be enforced not only through the copyright laws, but through conditions of access to biographical material. Few things are so irritating to the biographer as the encounter with this aspect of ancestor worship; few things

will give him a better insight into the social function of biography.

If the family's reputation is in the biographer's hands, so is the community's. Ancestor worship is a way of celebrating the community's past. Its great men and women are its collective ancestors, whose deeds give pride, and galvanize effort and emulation. Here again the biographer's part may be conservative, but it is not ignoble. To some degree the society's reputation, and hence its influence over mankind's imagination, is in his hands.

A further aspect of ancestor worship - and nowadays the most important - is potentially quite radical. That is its role in bringing testimony from the past to bear on living in the present. Far from being forgotten, the past is preserved more completely than ever before; its ability to bear witness is therefore greater than it ever was; and the evidence is that it is being ransacked ever more thoroughly in the service of modernity. The role of biography here is not to water dead flowers, but to give the assurance that that which has already flourished to some degree may achieve a more perfect flowering in the future. Every modern movement or tendency has its ancestral roll-call, which connects what has happened with what might possibly happen.

Biography, in this sense, has greater authority than fiction. Its subjects live in the imagination; but they are not products of the imagination. The evidence of their lives, therefore, is of far greater weight than that of any fictional life, however profoundly conceived. The confidence we can have that certain arrangements for living can "work" for us depends crucially on whether or not they have been tried out before. And while most of these patterns and arrangements have been traditional, others, from all periods of the past, have prefigured futures which have yet to be realized.

In this thought we may perhaps discover a justification for biography today which avoids most of the difficulties I have mentioned. Biography should not try to explain or illuminate achievement for us, which it cannot do. Rather the fame of the subject, because of which the biography is written, gives "permission" for a way of life. This links modern biography to what has always been its main purpose: to hold up lives as examples. The life itself is the achievement; not the explanation of it. What distinguishes modern biography from more traditional ancestor worship is the much greater range of ancestral lives on offer. Whereas in the past the exemplary principle worked in favour of tradition, today it works in favour of pluralism. This reflects great changes in social and historical circumstances; in our attitudes to work and play; to ourselves, and to our relationship with others and the world. Biography relates grand movements of consciousness to patterns of individual lives. It tells us stories, which cause us to dream, and from our dreams to make plans.

Sex scandal

Stephanie Nettell

A month ago Virago, the feminist publishers, launched the second wave of their new teenage list, *Upstarts*, which included a collection of stories, *Down the Road, Worlds Away*, by Rahila Khan. These cut effectively between the embattled worlds of a British Asian girl and a young white tough, and have a powerful edge. Reviewers welcomed the book.

This weekend the bombshell dropped: Rahila Khan is white and a man. Understandably embarrassed and hurt, less understandably morally outraged, Virago rushed to withdraw the book. It was angry, says its press release, on its own behalf as a feminist publishing house, and on behalf of its teenage readers; but particularly, it was "distressed that this attempt to represent the Asian community should transpire to be a cruel hoax". They refused to disclose their author's identity, or enquire into his motives - or even talk to him. (The Women's Press, who included a story by him in their *Livewires* collection, *A Girl's Best Friend*, are also furious, though anxious about the cost of following Virago's lead. "It's incredible how some men feel compelled to invade women's space.")

The author is Toby Forward, a thirty-seven-year-old parish priest of St Augustine's and St Saviour's in Brighton. With hindsight his profession is no surprise: no one reading these stories, about the burdens of love and hate in the world of today's young, and the different aspects of a God people carry in their hearts, could believe in "a cruel hoax". To be a priest, he felt, would mean his stories would never be read: "They're sit-com characters - no one believes priests can do anything."

His biographical note is true except for the personal pronoun (supplied by Virago). He is married with two daughters; he taught in a large comprehensive in Derby and in a C of E secondary school in Peterborough, where he introduced multi-cultural studies into his religious education classes - or "wog religions" as one colleague put it. At that time he found nothing in fiction to help white and Asian kids understand each other's beliefs, pressures and conflicts. So began what has amounted to a crusade as an anti-racist and, yes, a feminist.

He sent "Daughters of the Prophet" to Radio 4's *Morning Story*, using the name Rahila Khan because he thought, given the setting, it would make it more acceptable. It was rejected - the subject, circumcision, not quite the thing for that slot - but they asked for more. "Pictures", about a small girl's painting of a brown Mary and Baby Jesus being "too good, dear" to put on the wall by her infant teacher and stuffed anxiously into the bin by her mother, was accepted and five more followed. The producer thought highly enough of them to send them to John Murray, who said a book of short stories by a new writer was unthinkable, but was there a novel?

Rahila Khan was in too deep to escape. He tried to kill her off, writing stories under another, male, name - some taken, some rejected - but hearing Virago were searching for new writers of her kind, she survived. "I read Fay Weldon in the *Guardian* on how a writer will do anything, absolutely anything, to get published, and I knew what she meant." Somehow the right moment to reveal himself never came, until, with a novel completed, he found an agent who more realistically recognized that Virago had to be told.

A contract using a pseudonym is valid (he delivered the book, so can he sue Virago?), but does this change if the publisher is unaware of the fact? Can they then sue him? (What would have happened to George Eliot? And are young readers who still think Jan Mark is a man, or Jan Needle and Catherine Sefron are women, being cruelly hoodwinked?) If Virago believed the book was suited to their list, should they refuse to publish solely on the grounds of an author's sex?

The sense of betrayal, the belief that the author has lost all credibility, really springs from a gut feeling that only a woman can see into the hearts of women, and only a black has the right to portray, or suffer for, blacks. And all literature says that is a nonsense.

Letters

'Life: A User's Manual'

Sir, - I am afraid David Bellos (Letters, November 6-12) has completely missed the force of my criticisms of his translation of Georges Perec's *La Vie mode d'emploi*. He has also, by asserting that "it has been translated and edited with rather less carelessness than it has been reviewed", made it necessary for me to add to my extremely selective list of examples.

First, the ink-eraser "Kansell". The novel consists of a great many *objets trouvés*: quotations and mock-quotations, lists such as we find in Rabelais and Joyce, reproductions and mock-reproductions of title pages, visiting-cards, shop-signs and labels, in the manner of *Tristram Shandy*, etc. The impulse behind all this is not, of course, to take in the reader, but to raise questions in his mind about the status of words and objects in books, and, beyond that, about the nature of fiction and reality. The point is lost when the first level of reality is ignored; when, that is, a mock box-label could not possibly be the perfect reproduction of a real box-label. This happens when we read of a shop in Brussels which prints its address not as "rue des Dames, Bruxelles" (it appeared in my review, alas, as "rue de Dames"), but as the impossible "Dame Street, Brussels". Mention of Balzac and Dickens is beside the point. I am not asking Bellos to transpose the action of the novel to London; I am saying that to reproduce in mock-authentic lettering and carefully separated from the text by a black border an apparently authentic label, while making it impossible for the reader even to consider it as "real", is to destroy Perec's point. The witty translation, Bellos tells us, is not his own but Perec's, and he has merely restored the Joycean reference - but why did he then not go the whole hog and give the address as "Dame Street, Dublin"? If for some reason that was not possible then it would have been better to leave the whole thing in French, as he does for innumerable other such inserts. It seemed to me that firm initial decisions about this whole large area of the novel should have been taken and then stuck to, not out of some abstract theory of consistency but so as to convey an important part of the novel's theme.

Somewhat similar considerations apply to my second example, the appearance in the English text of a church called Santa Maria Maggiore. Bellos says that I "claim" that no such church exists in Rome and asks how I can be sure. My point was that no church of that name could exist because the correct ending of the adjective is in *e*. The French has "Sainte-Marie-Majeure", which is the French way of referring to what the Italians call Santa Maria Maggiore. Bellos says that "Perec's novel mixes fact and fiction in ways which delight readers". Precisely. But such delight stems from the fact that the details are either accurate or absurd yet plausible, like Malte d'Isillierle. Santa Maria Maggiore is neither. Its presence in the text merely conveys the impression to the reasonably cultured reader that the author believes this is how the name of the church is spelt. My point was that when dozens of such little carelessnesses on what seem to be the author's part are added up they convey the impression that the author didn't care too much about detail but was only interested in being funny. Exactly the opposite is the case. Perec was passionate to the point of pedantry about detail and he knew that humour as well as pathos only comes out of respect for things as they are. I thought it right to warn English readers that what they would be encountering was not a careless author but a careful translator, and I expressed surprise that no editor had at least asked the translator to check some of the more blatant examples of names, words and phrases which either made no sense at all or seemed to go against the run of the text.

Bellos passes over in silence my third example of carelessness. The English reads: "In the middle stands a table . . . on which sits a six-sided smoked-glass table." When I came across this I turned in disbelief to the French and found: "Au centre . . . une table, constituée par un fait de verre . . . sur lequel est posée une plaque hexagonale de verre fumé." What we have is not two tables, one on top of the other, but a base and a surface, forming a rather eccentric piece of furniture, no doubt, but a perfectly plausible one. Other examples of nonsense in the English are: "transverse obsolete medieval and oriental weapons" where the French simply has "des panoplies d'anciennes armes médiévales et orientales"; and no reference to anything "transverse"; and "the artist, flaunting all verisimilitude". "To flaunt" means to make a show of, which is the opposite of what the French says - "au mépris de toute vraisemblance" - and makes no sense at all. Could Bellos have meant "flouting"? And why did no editor pick this up?

One moves then to that grey area where obvious errors shade into awkward renderings, and the book is full of these: "Lady Forthright, woken in a start by the hammer"; "three shoe-boxes full of slips of card covered in meticulous writing"; "begged him to free her of this slug-faced man who had become for her a nightmare of every minute"; "in not far short of a contorted position"; "it was one of those days when (so as not to cause a surprise) the lift was out of order" ("C'était un de ces jours, où, pour ne pas changer [ie, as usual], l'ascenseur était en panne"); and my favourite, "as soon as they got home Baoubaker would give her terrible rows".

One of the wonderful things about the instrument Perec has forged for writing his novel is the suppleness and ease with which it can move between different language registers. Bellos often tries to give a sense of the speaking voice, even of an ironical voice, but the result is a strange dead tongue no one has ever spoken: "Usually, kitting out a space for living always ends up being a sometimes sticky compromise" for "alors que l'aménagement d'un cadre de vie résulte toujours de compromis parfois délicats"; "avec une fougue presque romanesque"; "suchlike taste bud topics" for "autres propos de guelelle". At times, too, the translation evokes echoes which are not there in the French and which are merely a distraction, as when the French "en lui décrivant de sa toute petite voix" becomes "as she describes in her still, small voice". But this lack of control of tone is most damaging in the rare instances when actual speech has to be translated: "Most of the time Valène would shake his head and with a few curt phrases - your sky's too heavy, that's out of balance, you've missed the effect . . ."

Does anyone speak like that? Has anyone ever said "that's out of balance"? As I read through the translation with growing concern for what was being done to Perec's novel, I surmised that the only possible reason for such a sorry performance was carelessness. Bellos assures me that he was not careless, and he presumably knows. What I should have said was that the translation gave the impression of carelessness on the part of both translator and publisher. A book like this is not going to be translated again for a long time and when the publishers took it on they surely knew of its growing reputation. The only explanation I can come up with as to why such sentences as I have quoted above (and they are only the tip of the iceberg) were allowed into print is that the publishers felt that here was a great rollicking novel, perhaps, who knows, even a "magical realist" novel, and that with such works everything goes. Of course it is nothing of the sort. It is cool and precise, beautifully written, and its author can account for every word.

Finally, since Bellos suggests that I am trying to set Harry Mathews and himself against each other for my own nefarious purposes, let me quote a brief passage from Chapter 27. According to the Translator's Note appended to the English edition, "Chapters 27 and 74 . . . have appeared previously . . . in translations by Harry Mathews which are reused here, with minor modifications, with the kind permission of the translator". In his letter Bellos changes this to "reworkings". I don't have Mathews's original translations to hand so I cannot check what this means, but it does not seem very important.

The passage concerns a present given to Valène by the furniture restorer Grifalconi, and, like so much else in the novel, it can stand as an image of the whole. Asked to restore a table badly affected by woodworm, Grifalconi begins by injecting into the holes a mixture of lead, alum and asbestos fibre. It turns out, however, that even thus reinforced the leg will not provide the necessary support, and he is

forced to make a new one: It was after he had done this that he thought of dissolving what was left of the original wood so as to disclose the fabulous arborescence within, this exact record of the worms' life inside the wooden mass: a static, mineral accumulation of all the movements that had constituted their blind existence, their undeviating single-mindedness, their obstinate literariness; the faithful materialisation of all they had eaten and digested as they forced from their dense surroundings the invisible elements needed for their survival, the explicit, visible, immeasurably disturbing image of the endless progressions that had reduced the hardest of woods to an impalpable network of crumbling galleries.

If these chapters are indeed Bellos's own work then surely all admirers of the novel will wish that he had produced equally accomplished work for the rest of the book.

GABRIEL JOSIPOVICI,
60 Prince Edward's Road, Lewes, Sussex.

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GABRIEL JOSIPOVICI,
60 Prince Edward's Road, Lewes, Sussex.

The British Council

Sir, - As I read Simon Jenkins's article on the British Council (November 6-12) I had a growing sense of having been there before, some forty years before. Except that the old guard of those days seems to have become the new guard of these. (The terminology more commonly used in the past was "short-hairs" and "long-hairs".) I spent twenty years teaching English literature abroad, only three of them, I should make plain, and not the best, on British Council contracts. The impression I formed concerning the Council's achievements was that they depended on the individual staff member: was he or she liked, and trusted, and good at the job? Hence the only generalization I came up with was that he or she was most effective when seen to keep at a safe distance from the diplomatic establishment. Any hint that the flag, in whatever form, was following culture would damage local confidence.

Jenkins's argument is that the British Council should sever all formal links with the Foreign Office - ah, if only that were possible! - and then offer its services to individual embassies "à la carte". ("We'll start with a little English lesson, then a lightly soured poet, with a ballerina to follow . . .") This would give the Foreign Office total jurisdiction over the Council's activities: which I doubt the diplomats would enjoy, being already a busy lot. Incidentally, Sir John Burgh's reference, to "British cultural values for their own sake" is by no means as feeble as Jenkins suggests, given what the (admittedly ambiguous) expression "for their own sake" can imply.

What is new about the article is the "Thatcherite" scorn for imponderables and the tedious obsession with privatization and cost-effectiveness: Make It Pay Because If It Does It's Bound To Be Good. But quite possibly I have misunderstood; even the term "cultural diplomacy" stamps me. The only proposition I would dare to advance is this: when at any given time there is one man or woman working in committee work in London, something must be wrong. As things stand, the individual is likely to find that working for the most - how shall I put it? - the most difficult foreign government or institution is more satisfying (if less secure) than working for the Council. This might not be the case if the Council were allowed to pursue its objectives without everybody, whether informed or otherwise, butting in.

D. J. ENRIGHT,
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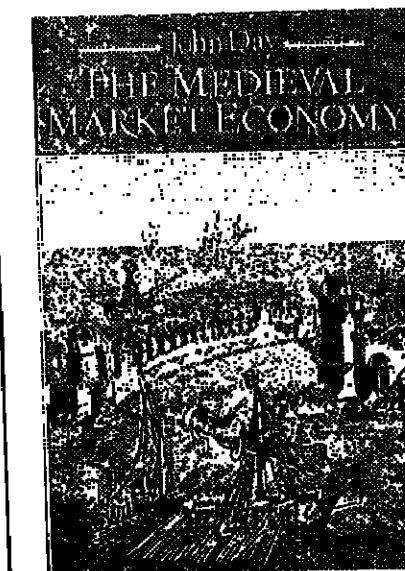
Favourite Flower

Sir, - Like your reviewer, Boyd Hilton (October 16-22), I read that A. J. P. Taylor claimed that he had fabricated the story that Queen Victoria meant that primroses were Prince Albert's favourite flower, not Disraeli's. Unlike Boyd Hilton, I checked the sources.

Monypenny and Buckle's *Life of Disraeli* (1920) contains in the last chapter a clear account of the controversy which must be almost as old as the phrase itself. A. J. P. Taylor must have remembered it, but have forgotten that he had done so.

M. L. R. ISAAC,
Lytner Upper School, London W6.

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In brief

The famously louché whippet-fancier and novelist Dan Kavanagh was last week publicly exposed for the first time as the persona behind which the serious writer Julian Barnes disports himself. Barnes's secret was never very carefully kept but those who were intrigued by the lurid dust-jacket details and by a promisingly low-life profile in *Time Out* may have been disappointed when the "real" Dan Kavanagh, advertised as taking part in one of the ICA's lunchtime conversations, did not appear. Ruth Rendell, who also writes under her married name of Barbara Vine, was present when Kavanagh came clean.

During the course of a rather cosy chat about crime fiction - much of which was on the lines of "when you lent me your cottage" and "my American editor said" - the question of pseudonym-psychosis was aired and evaded. Both writers gave as a reason for using an alter ego the freedom to indulge in more direct social criticism. Rendell also felt that she needed two names because she wrote so much. And Kavanagh wanted to experiment with the

conventions of the thriller genre and a "streetier style" without disappointing readers of Julian Barnes.

The Booker, the Somerset Maugham, the Llewellyn Rhys and the Dylan Thomas prizes all came round at this time of year, creating a lively if somewhat confusing air of celebration in the British literary world. The still-pending Whitbread prize - at £20,000, the country's most valuable - offers fresh puzzlement. Judges are faced with the difficult and dubious task of choosing the Book of the Year from a shortlist of winners in five (or really six) categories: novel, children's novel, first novel, poetry, fiction and biography/autobiography. The difficulty comes not only from the high number of entries - this year a record 398 - but from the incompatibility of genres and the problem of weighing the very different achievements of the various authors. (The latest polished performances of Salman Hamey and Francis Wyndham are pitted

against the poignant true life story told by the talented and severely handicapped Christopher Nolan, the category winner for biography/autobiography who taught himself to type by attaching a unicorn stick to his head.) Another difficulty, of a statistical nature, suggests that it is harder to win in the novel category, which had 105 submissions, than in the poetry, which had sixty-four.

How are judges to decide? One way would be to take a tip from the professionals. William Hill bookmakers place Nolan as the 6-4 favourite to win the overall honour. Holding in second place in the betting (5-2) is Ian McEwan's winner of the novel section, *The Child in Time*, which William Hill describes as "seeking to emulate Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *An Artist of the Floating World*, which won last year's overall award." And once a winner is found how much will he/she receive? Whitebread seems uncertain. "Each category winner," they say, "receives £1,250.00, but last week's cheque were handed out to the five embarrasingly in the amount of £1,000.00."

COMMENTARY

Messages for the masses

David Nokes

The Trumpet of Prophecy
Channel 4

There was something marvellously old-fashioned about Paul Foot's barn-storming performance in *The Trumpet of Prophecy*. Filmed in an echoing hall in Rotherhithe, his television lecture combined the knockabout humour of a music-hall comic, the evangelical passion of a fundamentalist preacher and the political rhetoric of a soap-box orator. The programme proved that what had really been wrong with Foot's book *Red Shelley* (1981), from which most of the lecture was taken, was not the message but the medium. As a book it fell prey to all those dreary do's and stuffy students whose prejudices in favour of accuracy Foot so despises. But here on television Foot was able to appeal to the masses, inciting them to rise up like lions and shake off the tyranny of politicians and pedants. Like a seasoned campaigner he warmed up his audience with a few cave jokes at the expense of those doddering old duffers, the professors. He did funny voices for Leavis, Quigley, Glover et al., making them sound like octogenarian versions of Lord Snooty and his pals, while the screen showed us shots of toffs in boaters swigging champagne. According to the professors, Foot told us, poetry was all about Nature, and especially about daffodils. The great thing about daffodils was that they never went on strike. That was why the professors liked them. Nothing offended the professors more than the idea that poetry might be contaminated by politics. He read out these tell-tale words from Elizabeth Quigley's introduction to the Penguin edition of Shelley: "no poet better repays cutting". What she had cut, of course, said Foot, was the politics.

Foot gave us his own cut-out, pop-up version

The poet and the censor

Elaine Feinstein

RICHARD CRANE
Pushkin
Blossoms Theatre

In this lively play, which won the Fringe First Award at the Edinburgh Festival this year, Richard Crane uses sections of Pushkin's poems and stories to tell the story of the poet's short life. The actors have whitened faces like puppets; but they take on a variety of parts without sacrificing human feeling. Presumably it is Crane's work with Lyubimov which has so freed his imagination. It was in Lyubimov's production of *Crime and Punishment* that the audience experienced how the image of a single bloodstained door could return again and again to dominate the stage like a nightmare. Here it is the image of a body on a sledge in the snow (visible as the audience files in) which calls up Pushkin's fatal duel from the outset. Fayna Williams's direction makes good use of whiteness and minimal props throughout.

Crane employs the language of poetry without the slightest awkwardness. Pushkin's story is deliberately simplified, so that his political opposition to the Tsar remains constant without confusing the line of the narrative with episodes of compromise; and the Tsar's fear of Pushkin is made to stem mainly from the poet's identification with the Decembrists (one of whom is said to have had a poem of Pushkin's in his pocket when he was hanged). The simplification seems legitimate. Pushkin was rumoured to have replied to the Tsar that he would have been in the tanks of the Decembrists if he had been in St Petersburg on the day of the uprising. And whether or not the Tsar kept Pushkin close to the Court so that his wife's coquetry should undo him, the opposition between Tsar and poet has remained central to the story.

Some of the play's use of Pushkin's work is daring. There is a sprightly translation from an obscene lyric censored by the Tsar, and the voice of the censor is made part of a theatrical

of Shelley the revolutionary. It was a lively and provocative piece of polemic that turned Shelley's verse into a series of political lampoons and revolutionary aphorisms. Many of Foot's observations on the suppression and censorship of Shelley's political thought were dominated by the desire to draw modern analogies. In his remarks on "The Mask of Anarchy" he reminded us pointedly that the Tory government of the time had just been re-elected for a third term. Actors declaimed lines from the poem while drawings of the Peterloo massacre merged into images of 1980s inner-city decay. *The Revolt of Islam*, he asserted, was "through all its many, many pages a hymn to women's liberation". Shelley wasn't deceived by the sham of parliamentary democracy, Foot declared with evident approval. "Rise like lions" was his slogan: "He wasn't so interested in going along like lambs to the ballot-box."

Increasingly Foot's description of Shelley seemed like a form of veiled autobiography. Pondering the dilemmas of the ageing revolutionary "with streaks of grey in his hair" he pointed to his own greying locks. One by one Shelley's former comrades had sold out and deserted the cause. Wordsworth, up in Cumbria, was supporting the local Tory. "Daffodils and the Tory party" was his election slogan. In his peroration Foot returned to the "Ode to the West Wind" with which the lecture had begun. Those parti-coloured leaves whose inaccurate tints of yellow and black and pale and hectic red had caused such mirth among the professors, were not really leaves at all, but the races of mankind, the downtrodden generations of the oppressed. In his triumphant final exegesis of the poem Foot turned aside the sneers of all the profs and toffs to prove how an ageing revolutionary could rekindle the inspiration of his youth. "Now," he concluded, with a victorious smile, "I think it means something, doesn't it?"

game. In one of his "Little Tragedies" Pushkin wrote about the pain of Salieri's envy of Mozart, and the actor who plays the Tsar utters some of Salieri's feelings tellingly. Less controversially, lines from Tatyana's letter in *Eugene Onegin* engage our sympathies for Pushkin's wooing of Natalya Goncharova; and D'Anthes, Pushkin's murderer, uses the words of Onegin. Excellent use is made of "The Bronze Horseman" to point up how Pushkin loved the city of Petersburg, with its river banks and iron railings, far more than his task of writing about Peter the Great at the behest of the Tsar.

The acting, notably of Richard Crane as Pushkin, is of a high standard, and the direction is unforced and fluent throughout, though there are drawbacks to the use of unaccompanied voices in a theatre of this size. Crane's translation of "Exegi Monumentum" makes a magnificent conclusion to the play.

The Theatre Museum's first season of performances includes productions of *Four Portraits of Mothers* by Arnold Wesker (November 17-29), *Uncommon Encounters: A Homage to Shakespeare* (December 1-13) and *A Singular Museum: The Dancer as Solist*, six nights of solo dances (December 13-15). The work of the winners of the Linbury Prize for Stage Design will be on show in an exhibition of award-winning entries and selected designs at the Theatre Museum from November 18 to January 31, 1988. Further details are available from the Theatre Museum, 18 Tavistock Street, London WC2E 7PA.

The National Theatre's Education Department, which has recently been expanded, has widened its scope to encourage audiences to meet and work with the actors, directors, writers and designers of the National Theatre Company. National Theatre Education now organizes small-scale national tours and publishes resource material. Plans for 1987/8 include tours of David Hare's *Fatherland*, directed by DJ Trevis, and Nick Ward's *After From George*. Further information is available from National Theatre Education, National Theatre, South Bank, London SE1 8PA.

Ceremonies of dying

Malcolm Bowie

JEAN GENET
Deathwatch and The Maids
The Pit, Barbican

"Two images kept going through my mind", someone ahead of me said, as we trooped upwards from the Pit at the end of this Genet evening, "a large warm bed and a large drink". It was good to hear that someone else had been waging a mental fight against Genet's death-haunted imagery. What might happen to a theatre-goer who didn't defend his creature comforts and his private spaces in this way? He could find himself stepping forward, as at a revivalist meeting, to join Genet's ceremony of the dying, to raise a cheer for murder and suicide, to claim his share of delectable darkness.

A strong vocal link has been found between these plays and *The Balcony*, which preceded them in the RSC's extended Genet season: the melodious braying of Gerard Murphy, who last time was the rebel-leader turned police-chief and is now both Green Eyes in *Deathwatch* and Solange in *The Maids*. But there is even better news, for Murphy himself directs both halves of the double-bill, finds a different kind of mad intensity for each of them, and yet manages to suggest, by reusing a single group of actors and by rhyming their gestures and inflections, that these could as easily be Acts One and Two of an incomplete mortuary pageant as two separate plays.

In the mid-1960s Genet made a brief appearance in *Tel Quel* as a futuristic town-planner: how about bringing the crematorium in from the outskirts and placing it as a monument, busy and visible, at the hub of the community? It could be a combined civic centre, theatre and shrine. And he had practical instructions along the same lines for his directors. In footnotes to both plays he warned them to avoid all random scurrying about on the stage. The characters must move in accordance with a pre-ordained geometrical plan and that plan must speak of death. Such talk sounds at first like a desperate

attempt to tame the images of death-factory and necropolis that the Nazi period bequeathed to Europe, to reorganize all that monstrosity into a simple *jeu d'esprit*. Genet even speaks of Dachau as an inspired town-square idea in his *Tel Quel* essay, in what is clearly meant to be a gesture of sublime tastelessness – as if decorum were somehow the main enemy. But the plays in performance are much more ingeniously disturbing than any of Genet's scandal-seeking commentaries would suggest. For although each play presses forward to an exalted moment of slaughter or self-immolation, these last pleasures must not come precociously. In both, an awareness of impending death is the ground of all other awareness, but there are countless transient delights to be pursued. Genet takes us into a world of feint and deferral, of play-acting and self-exciting mendacity, of fantasy tricked out *à deux* and *à trois*. Each human being desires the death, but not quite yet, of the other. These plays disturb because they catch so many of the ordinary manoeuvres of consciousness into their tales of doom.

Genet came to disown *Deathwatch* and in his later life had no wish to see his prison-drama performed. This production, fluent and impassioned as it is, would not have persuaded him to change his mind. The play has too few dramatic ideas and too much flat dialogue to survive alone. Yet it works rather well as a grey prelude to the flower-filled boudoir-drama of *The Maids*. This second play is brilliantly done, and only one thing about the production may seem puzzling. The prison without walls that Claire and Solange construct for themselves has so little to do with sexual difference that transvestism at first looks like a travesty or an irrelevance. But when drag-effects are exquisitely controlled as they are here, the new level of meaning added to the play is entirely in the spirit of Genet. A man plays a woman playing a maid playing a female employer playing a dutiful wife. Impersonation is all; when we desert from it we die. Small wonder that an average theatre-goer should, in his mind's eye, reach for the bottle and retire between the sheets.

Underlining estrangement

Duncan Wu

HENRIK IBSEN
A Doll's House
Adapted by Maggie Wadey
Palace Theatre, Watford

The lights go up on Lou Stein's excellent production of *A Doll's House* to discover Nora gobbling macaroons. She hurriedly conceals them as her husband, Thorvald, enters, because "he's afraid they'll ruin my teeth". In Act Two of the original play Nora asks that macaroons be served to the guests at the Christmas dance; here she declares, "I want to eat macaroons – all those things that are so bad for me!" By highlighting such details, Maggie Wadey's new adaptation (Janet Garton is credited as the translator) charts the psychological undercurrents of Ibsen's drama; she intensifies Nora's derangement by contracting the action, and breaks each of its three acts into discrete scenes, reflecting Nora's mental disintegration.

Susan Penhaligon's fine performance as Nora is complemented by Stephanos Lazaridis's impressive set – not the familiar drawing-room of countless Ibsen productions, but a symbolic landscape of guilt and fear, justifying Thorvald's "This is a madhouse!" Everything, even the few articles of furniture, is black; the steadily descending ceiling and sliding screens reflect Nora's attempts to lock out an ever-sneering reality. In the opening scene, a screen draws back to reveal Mrs Linde standing in a pool of light, literally a ghost from the past. Later, while Nora plays hide-and-seek with her children, she pulls a screen aside to disclose the menacing Krogstad. Such touches illustrate her growing inability to repress her fears. Only when she liberates herself does the ceiling rise and the screen disappear, allowing light to flood the stage.

felt more clear-headed in my life", she says. As she steps outside, the ceiling descends again, leaving Thorvald clutching her dancing dress, the last remains of the delusion in which he remains imprisoned. David Gwillim's portrayal offers a more sympathetic Thorvald than is usual. The speeches in which he says that it would be best if they saw no more of the dying Dr Rank, and cold-bloodedly analyses the uselessness of Nora's possible suicide, have been omitted. Instead, the adaptation emphasizes his understanding of Nora's new-found independence. To her claim, "I have spent eight years living with a stranger", he replies "We are like strangers".

This estrangement is underlined by Nora's relationships with other characters. Charlotte Cornwell as Mrs Linde quickly establishes her role as Nora's adviser, so that her claim "I need someone to mother" is convincing. John Fortune portrays a Krogstad haunted by Nora. When he confronts her about the signature she has forged, he sits next to her on the *chaise-longue* like a squire. In this adaptation he describes the loan he made to her as a "bond" – not so much to invite comparison with Shylock, as to acknowledge his affinity with her.

By comparison with Krogstad, Dr Rank is as blind as Thorvald, unaware of the tension underlying Nora's behaviour even as she flicks her stockings in his face. He lacks Thorvald's pomposity, however, and Michael Burrell's skilful performance rightly plays down the pathos of his last farewell. In one instance, the adaptation perhaps takes emotional understatement too far: it omits the painful moment when Rank warns of his impending death by posting his warning card, marked with a black cross, into Thorvald's letterbox. This omission also entails that of Thorvald's callous remarks about Rank, which expose the hollowiness of their friendship. But only those waiting for this episode will find its absence conspicuous.

The spectacle of Macbeth

Lois Potter

SHAKESPEARE
Macbeth
Lyttelton Theatre
London Palladium

Macbeth is probably the most universally accessible of Shakespeare's tragedies, but in performance it often disappoints. The problem is that most productions focus on the psychology of the two central characters. This works well in the earlier acts, which operate at a high level of imaginative excitement, but after the disappearance of Lady Macbeth the fatigue and emptiness of Macbeth's final state can easily be transferred to the play itself. The two visiting productions from Japan and China show how this problem is confronted, or rather, ceases to exist, within a different philosophical and theatrical tradition.

They have little else in common. The Ninagawa Company of Tokyo plays an almost uncut translation, set in feudal Japan. Visually, it is beautiful; the iconography of falling cherry blossoms, blood-red sun and flickering candles is easily understood, as are even the more exotic devices of Kabuki production like the pantomime horses on which Macbeth and Banquo make their first entrance. The most puzzling feature is the use of Western music: does it sound exotic and eerie to Japanese ears, or does its lush romanticism correspond to something that the director Yukio Ninagawa wishes to stress? Far more questions are raised by the adaptation by the Shanghai Kunju Company. The problem does not lie with the music, which, especially in its evocation of dreams and madness, is not too unfamiliar to our ears. It is impossible to judge the libretto (by Zheng Shifeng) from the surtitles projected during the performance, which mix Shakespeare with

lines like "Three cheers! let's drink to dynastic transition". Its portrayal of Macbeth as a man driven by what he believes to be the will of heaven and his heightening of the guilt of Lady Macbeth may be a comment on recent Chinese history. But the unfamiliar Kunju sign system makes it difficult to know whether to read it in terms of tragedy, comedy, melodrama, burlesque, or even circus. Whereas Shakespeare's play stages the supernatural and the process of introspection but keeps most "real" events off-stage, Kunju is almost pure spectacle. It shows everything except the murder of Duncan – and even that is so audible that the royal physician rushes off to tell the heir-apparent to escape. Encounters with the supernatural take the form of whirling dance movements. In the banquet scene, Macbeth's courtiers flatter him by pretending to see the ghost and encourage him in his spectacular attempts to kill it. Lady Macbeth is pursued by the ghosts of Duncan, Banquo, and Lady Macduff (her sister) and by a green demon. The fight sequences are an acrobatic delight.

Perhaps the *Macbeth* that Pepys saw, with its operatic witches, was like this. Both productions reminded me still more of nineteenth-century European theatre with its striking poses, sharp contrasts, and use of sound effects to reinforce emotion. We are not asked to assume an ultimate reality behind what we see. Thus, the Japanese version of the scene between Malcolm and Macbeth makes more sense than usual, because Malcolm simply becomes the embodiment, first, of evil, then of all the kingly virtues. Perhaps because the costumes are so striking, both productions make one intensely aware of the play's image of the giant's robe on the dwarfish thief. In the Ninagawa production, Duncan's armour dominates the stage while Macbeth contemplates his murder, and the armour of giant warriors dwarfs Malcolm and Macduff as they plan rebellion.

Tidying up Lear

H. R. Woudhuysen

NAHUM TATE
The History of King Lear
Lyttelton Theatre

A level pupils, undergraduates and some theatre audiences all know that Nahum Tate rewrote *King Lear* to give it a happy ending. How many have actually read Tate's version or seen it acted is another matter: having dominated the English stage for 150 years until Kean and Macready gradually replaced it with Shakespeare's original between 1823 and 1838, *The History of King Lear* is widely known about, but itself little known. Robert Clare's staged reading of it on November 6 at the Lyttelton Theatre gave a large and enthusiastic audience the chance to see what it is like. The text was cut to fit two hours' unbroken playing time, with actors in everyday clothes playing their parts while reading their lines from open books. This might have led to low comedy, but the energy and serious commitment of the actors and director allowed the play to stand on its own and what laughter there was came out of the absurdity of Tate's writing. Some of the power of the original survived Tate's rehandling: Gloucester's leap from Dover cliff still had the power to stun and silence, as well as to baffle and amuse.

The rapid pace of the production was exemplary, with particularly fine performances from John Bluthall as Lear, Ian Bolt as Edgar, Peter Gordon as Kent and Shirley Henderson as Cordelia. On these fell the burden of Tate's major structural change, his abolition of the Fool's role. This is part of that tidying up of the play by which Tate, invoking Dryden in the play's dedication, undertakes to turn Shakespeare's "Heap of Jewels, unstrung and unpollished; yet so dazzling in their disorder" into a regular and probable tale.

The result is not just a neater play, with its love interest between Edgar and Cordelia, but also a much more coherent one – Cordelia's puzzlingly extreme behaviour in the first scene

is explained by her lying to her father to avoid being married off to Burgundy, whom she does not love. The complicated narrative of Shakespeare's version is radically simplified to create a much more pleasingly patterned whole, but one which still retains some of the melodramatic touches of Shakespeare's version. The notorious happy ending, in which Cordelia marries Edgar and goes off to rule the kingdom, can be seen to be a logical outcome of what has gone before rather than merely as an aberration of Restoration taste; it is not that unpleasantness had to be excluded from the Restoration stage, but that morality and the play's reworked features demanded a happy conclusion. Tate brings out the pity we must feel for the distress of the lovers and their fathers, but does not spare us the horror of Gloucester's blinding and goes further by introducing Edmund's plan to rape Cordelia and Regan's adultery with Edmund. It is Shakespeare who gives his play an arbitrarily unhappy ending with the unnecessary execution of Cordelia, which so shocked and disturbed Samuel Johnson. Tate's ending is least convincing in Lear's sudden restoration to sanity and his decision to go off with Gloucester and Kent "to some cool Cell" to reflect on "our Fortunes past" during "the prosperous Reign/Of this celestial pair". The political overtones of the plot are never far from Tate's mind: ideas of restoration were still current when the play was written in 1680, and the Duke of Monmouth was a growing anxiety in Charles II's kingdom. His major concern in the play is with the problems of an illegitimate son in revolt against his father and of the civil insurrection against his father and of the civil insurrection against his father and of the civil insurrection against his father.

The text of *King Lear* which most eighteenth-century and Romantic critics saw as one which derived from Tate's. Robert Clare's enterprising production showed that it makes sense and holds the attention: without patronizing it, he revealed its obvious weaknesses against Shakespeare's version; but also, made clear its evident strengths.

The glittering costume of the Kunju Macbeth vibrates, at every emotion, from his bobble-trimmed head-dress to the blocks under his shoes. In Lady Macbeth's mad scene, the "rippling-water" sleeves which play such a large part in the Chinese gestural vocabulary become longer and longer as Zhang Jing Xian desperately tries to beat off the apparitions.

The most exciting aspect of both productions is Lady Macbeth. In contrast with traditional practice, the part is played by an actress. But her delicately restricted movements and voice suggest an impersonation of femaleness. By contrast, her violence, and the despair unleashed in the sleepwalking scene, shock our stereotype of the submissive Eastern woman, as the Jacobean boy actor may have shocked the stereotypes of his audience. The Ninagawa's stunning Komaki Kurihara even becomes comic at the start of the murder scene, when she drunkenly admonishes the owl to be quiet, and in the banquet scene when she turns on Macbeth and the guilt-haunted warrior becomes a henpecked husband.

If by comparison *Macbeth* seems a somewhat diminished figure it is because of the play's religious perspective. Like the Herod of medieval cycle drama, he is unquestionably evil but at the same time comic within the larger view of events known only to the mocking witches. (The high-pitched voices of the Japanese actors lend an ironic note to their salutations of "Banzai!"; the Chinese witches, grotesquely comic, conclude the play by warning the audience not to make Macbeth's mistake of believing everything it sees. This recalls the old tradition of giving these roles to the company's low comedians.) Yet neither version is simply a dismissal of Macbeth. Because there is no doubt about his villainous status, he can be allowed a final magnificent display. Masane Tsukayama fights, as Edmund Kean's Richard III is supposed to have fought, "like



"Leda and the Swan" by Bartolommeo Ammaniti, (1511-92), one of a series of photographs of sculptures by Joe Whitlock Blundell which can be seen in an exhibition Glyptomania: Sculpture in the Classical Tradition at the Judd Street Gallery, 9 Judd Street, London WC1, until November 20.

one drunk with wounds". Ji Zheng Hua dominates a Kunju circus of tumbling and sword-play. The more effectively the actor struts and frets his hour upon the stage, the more he emphasizes the power of the illusions to which he has succumbed. On the evidence of these fascinating productions, it would seem that the problems of *Macbeth* can best be solved by embracing its spectacular theatrical possibilities rather than regarding them as a distraction from its true meaning.

A mechanical Hamlet

Philip Brady

HEINER MÜLLER
Hamletmaschine
Almeida Theatre

Heiner Müller and his producer Robert Wilson are extremely well known in West Germany, although their work is rarely seen in London. Müller is the prolific East German dramatist, habitually defeating the predictions of those who think they know what to expect from an East German; Wilson, New-York-based, is the creator of precisely structured, cavernously spacious stage-compositions. They make an unusual combination. Wilson is associated with coolness and airiness while Müller's plays have unleashed a torrent of bloody and thunderous effects across the West German theatre.

The text of *Hamletmaschine* is challengingly brief – the printed version is less than ten pages. It packs stridenties and violent images into a kind of apocalyptic shorthand which, lengthened out, might lose impact. Hamlet, Europe in ruins behind him, gibbers at the open sea, inveighing against all mothers. Ophelia, archetypal abused woman, speaks for all victims. In the realm of the dead, philosophers throw books at Hamlet, and dead women perform a ballet. The actor abandons his Hamlet-role, launching into a tirade against some familiar targets (Coca-Cola, television, consumerism) and declaring a new personal goal: "I want to be a machine. Arms for grabbing, legs for walking, no pain, no thought."

To move from Müller's version of Baroque, climax heaped on climax, to Wilson's production is to enter a different world – or, perhaps, the same world seen from an unexpected angle. The stage is uncluttered – metal chairs, a thin metal table centre-stage, a skeletal tree, the left wall a large white screen behind a line of footlights. On a tattered revolving chair a woman sits, with ashen face and wild hair. A wood-block sounds – it is to be the metronome

for the entire production – the woman revolves, her mouth fixed in a silent scream. It sounds again, and a slim woman walks to the tree. At each sound from the block a figure walks, takes up a position and holds it. Three women, with red lips and long lacquered nails, moving in unison, walk to the table, sit, tilt their chairs and begin to scrape their nails on the table top. The stage fills with people each in their own world, never touching, facing all directions, unaware of an audience. They stare, grin, scowl like automata and, against a background of distant single notes on a piano, scratching noises and – briefly – machine-guns, they remain silent.

At a signal all stand and shift the entire set through ninety degrees. The ritual begins again at the new angle. At last an actor speaks – "I was Hamlet". Four times actors and stage shift in a clockwork progression interrupted only once, when a screen descends across the stage, concealing the actors, and the scene reappears on film, with the actors shrivelling into flames and finally forming an abstract pattern, while Müller's directions for his vision of the dead appear as a running subtitle.

Müller's text begins to emerge, fragmented and repeated, in voices amplified – and disembodied – via loudspeakers. By now the risk is clear – audio-visual counterparts to Müller's heavy underlinings could amount to Baroque-times-two. But Wilson has found the very chill behind Müller's heated rhetoric. The result is a bleak and haunted atmosphere but, despite the depersonalized style of Wilson's excellent ensemble, it is fiercely involved rather than abstract.

The effect is achieved through details seen and heard and meticulously executed: Hamlet swaggering up to Ophelia and sliding past her; a figure, black-faced and wholly in black, standing behind a woman in evening dress and suddenly snapping his hands together in front of her eyes; Hamlet, his face hidden behind a sheet of white paper, screaming as he slowly tears it in half, the sound amplified to an electric crackle. These single images, like most of the figures who people this limbo-world, are of Wilson's making, not Müller's.

Paperbacks

Peter Kemp makes a selection of current paperback biographies

From Mao to Queen Mary, the Little Flower to the Great Bear, Nobel Coward to Jack Kerouac, paperback lives have teamed out this year with their customary diversity. If you want to know what it was like to be the "Last Wild Indian" in North America or the First Lady of Hollywood, there are books to tell you all about it (*Ishi in Two Worlds* and *Swanson on Swanson*). You can find out about life as a Greek millionaire (*Ar*) or an Elizabethan martyr (*Edmund Campion*), as a reincarnated lama (*Tibet is My Country*) or a society beauty whose career was cut short by unsuccessful cosmetic surgery on the nose (*Clodys Duchesse of Marlborough*). In particular, the number of women's autobiographies has continued to swell. Some intriguing first-hand accounts of very diverse female experience are on offer: how to run a sixteenth-century convent with advice on the warding off of a demon who's assumed the form of a small Negro (*The Life of St Teresa of Avila by herself*), the triumphs and tribulations of being a woman playwright during the Restoration (*A Woman of No Character*), how to put Florence Nightingale in her place while running a hospital kitchen in the Crimea (*An Autobiography of Elizabeth Davis*), the realities of being a starlet in the American film-world of the 1920s (from which Louise Brooks's stringent memoirs, *Lulu in Hollywood*, tinglingly swab the flattering make-up). Another notable development has been the start of two first-class new series: Caswell Biographies and Oxford Lives. The former - already encompassing a wide range of subjects - specializes in works written with marked stylistic flair and sophistication. The latter is rich in outstanding literary lives: David Nokes's *Jonathan Swift: A hypocrite reversed*, Michael Meyer's *Strindberg*, Antony Alpers's *Katherine Mansfield*, Michael Millgate's *Thomas Hardy*.

Standing out distinctively from this milling press of personalities and chronicled careers is Ved Mehta's *Saint-Shadows of the New World* (reviewed in the TLS of May 30, 1986). Autobiography usually opens your eyes to

what it is like to be someone else. This book enlighteningly closes them. Robustly devoid of the slightest trace of self-pity, it recreates the experience of an Indian boy, blind from infant meningitis, who at fifteen years old travelled from New Delhi to a special school in Little Rock, Arkansas. Powerfully and subtly, the book gives you, as you read it, a sense of life without sight. The phenomenon of "facial vision" - an ability to perceive objects through "echoing sound and changes of air pressure around the ears" - is evocatively transmitted. There's intense, superlative responsiveness to tastes and textures, smells and, especially, sounds. One girl in Mehta's group has a laugh that resembles "ice tinkling in a delicate sherbet glass". Another fascinates him by the way she says "cute": "Mary Ann flicked it off her tongue like a pomegranate seed".

The mixture of Eastern imagery and Western stimulation epitomizes another of the book's concerns - the struggle of someone brought up in Indian society to adjust, during the strains of adolescence, to American life: at first, the mere hearing of a kiva on the mouth makes Mehta queasy. Candour steers him round the embarrassments of this time. And it's to the love, too, in his accounts of what he presents as a particularly trying aspect of life for the blind: self-consciousness about their high visibility, as signalled by a "Seeing Dog" or white cane (both of which he rejects). "Each of you is an emissary to the country of the sighted", a teacher at the school remarks. "True to this notion, the book's despatches unforgottenly open up your awareness of the world of the blind."

Mehta takes you, instructively blindfolded, round a generally familiar society. Another noteworthy book, *Daughter of Tibet* by Rinchen Dolma Taring (reviewed in the TLS of July 31, 1970), matter-of-factly reminisces about a remote and extraordinary existence. Its opening chapters recall with charity naturalness everyday life as experienced early in the century by a girl belonging to the Lhasa nobility. Domestic problems like encroachments by she-demons ("souls of women who had died in anger") get briskly mentioned. Unusual educational techniques are calmly recollected: fortnightly in junior school, "the boy with top marks hit all the other boys on their blown-out cheeks with a flat bamboo stick. The second boy hit all those below him - and so on . . . this discipline made everyone work harder". Tibetan medical procedures, such as a cure for colic that consists of swallowing large black beetles crushed under a "silver spit-pot" and coated in butter, curiously enliven the pages.

What gives the book its irresistible grip is its combination of the exotic and the down-to-earth. At a grisly ceremony where corpses (whose hair, limbs and intestines have been ritually removed) are fed to vultures, attendants while away the time by plucking feathers from the tails of the gorging birds to make shuttlecocks for children. Assassinations, nuts with illegitimate children, saintly abbesses with names like "Thunderbolt Sow" swarm in the background of the narrative; in the foreground, there is frank homeliness as the author remembers her childhood love of making squares of lavatory-paper for her mother, or

the problem she had in discharging her placenta after childbirth, or how she slipped out her dentures when disguising herself as a peasant to evade detection by the invading Chinese. Descriptions of initial Tibetan attempts at peaceful co-existence with the latter - and of Mrs Taring's gruelling, perilous escape over the mountains when war erupted and bombs battered the lamaseries - add a further engrossing dimension to a book of unusual interest.

At the opposite extreme in subject is Robert Roberts's *A Ragged Schooling*, a boy's eye-view of growing up in the grimy slums of Edwardian Salford that is a little gas-lit masterpiece of memory. Occasionally, scenes are touched with tinges of sinister glamour: dye-works bordering the river Irwell pump it full of gaudy filth that delights the local youngsters ("brown would dissolve into Mediterranean blue, azure slide into rich crimson, frothing like dragon's blood, and on again to butter-milk veined with green"), a sunbeam falling through a factory window turns into a cone of gold because of the motes of metal dust chockily thick in the air. Mostly, though - despite plenty of episodes of resilient comedy - it is the drab, supping restrictions of this world of smoke and brick, clogs and consumption, that Roberts keeps you conscious of.

Influenced by his determined, remarkable mother, he ultimately climbed, via evening classes, into a career that combined writing and work in adult education. It is made clear at the end of Edwin Muir's *Autobiography* (reviewed in the TLS of November 12, 1954) that he arrived at a not-dissimilar position, though starting from a very different point - the unspoiled rural existence of Orkney. Before this, he had also experienced the sort of urban squalor Roberts so grittily documents. After a sheltered childhood surrounded by the islands' farms and fairy-tales, he was plunged, with the rest of the family, into the muck and din of turn-of-the-century Glasgow. Within four years, four of them were dead, and the disoriented Muir was sinking into a long nightmare of demoralization that culminated in a hideous job at a factory processing bones, truck-loads of which arrived, in a rancid fug, "decorated with festoons of slowly writhing, fat yellow maggots". There is an almost hallucinatory vividness to Muir's memories of this - just as there is a weird clarity in the ceaseless dreams and trances he remembers in uncanny detail.

Muir's later journeys for the British Council took him to the heart of Europe. This is the observation-point from which Stefan Zweig penned his resplendently cultivated autobiography, *The World of Yesterday* (reviewed in the TLS of November 27, 1943). Resolutely reticent on his private life - his first wife never gets a mention, his second wife just scrapes in with a last-minute reference - the book casts Zweig in "the role of a narrator at an intellectual lecture". The result is as informative as this would suggest - and far more elegant and alluring. As much the history of a generation and a continent as of an individual, it takes you from the serene last days of the Habsburg Empire and a Vienna of highly cosmopolitan culture to the war-time turmoil of a Europe barbarized by nationalism and Nazism. An indefatigable campaigner for internationalism, Zweig makes his book a

triumph of long perspectives and wide horizons. Gradually altering eras are observed with acute perception. Sensuous, reflective tribute is paid to the cities his artistic travellings have taken him to: Berlin, Paris, Salzburg, Warsaw, Moscow, London. An advocate of expansive sympathies, Zweig writes in a style that is superbly concise and taut. Unrolling a vast panorama of twentieth-century cultural history, he often focuses on cameos within it: Yeats, dressed in "monkish black" and posed between two altar candles, intoning his poetry in a London drawing-room; Joyce, glimpsed in Zurich, testy, thin-lipped, eyes keen behind thick lenses, brow possessing a white sheen like porcelain; Shaw and Wells tensely bickering at a dinner table; Richard Strauss - his face "almost banal with its fat, child-like cheeks" - rehearsing, with unromantic methodicalness, his *Egyptian Helen*.

Zweig's story, completed just before he and his wife killed themselves in Brazil in 1942, is an unwaveringly civilized account of a civilization's collapse. Providing a kind of bleak, dignified coda to it are the two autobiographical books of Primo Levi, another eventual suicide. *If This is a Man* (reviewed in the TLS of April 15, 1960) and *The Truce* (the Italian edition, *La Tregua*, was reviewed in the TLS of June 14, 1963). Typical of the heroic rationality Levi brings to his memoirs of the monstrous - months in a concentration camp, then the arduous return to his native Turin through a devastated Europe - is the opening sentence of the first book: "It was my good fortune to be deported to Auschwitz only in 1944". Twenty-four when this happened, Levi (believing "no human experience is without meaning or unworthy of analysis") scrutinizes reactions and processes with an attention to detail that reflects his training as a chemist. Not that there's anything inhuman in the way he does this. Witnessing a world in which people are reduced to "pieces" (the Nazi euphemism for doomed Jews), *If This is a Man*, resisting both recrimination and lament, maintains a high, humane stance. Unsurpassable as a feat of intellectual, moral and emotional fortitude, it puts you at inspiringly close quarters with a mind struggling to observe and comprehend, through an ordeal of physical and nervous extremity, while hemmed in by atrocity that seems simultaneously brutish and mechanical.

Finally, a feat of scholarly assiduity deserves mention: S. Schoenbaum's *William Shakespeare. A compact documentary life*. For this book, a compulsive exercise in academic detection work, Schoenbaum has pored over parish registers, folios and quartos, wills and tombstones, genealogies, hornbooks, commonplace books, letters from the Garter King-of-Arms, property records, plague statistics, woodcuts and sketches of contemporary playhouses. From shaky quill pen strokes to precise computer print-outs on "Lexical Choice Variables", he has always something interesting to deduce or debate. Everything of possible relevance is raked in, it seems, right down to a report of Shakespeare's father being fined for having an unauthorized midden.

"The task of the responsible biographer is to clear away the cobwebs", Schoenbaum observes. He does this exhilaratingly. Musty myths about Shakespeare - poaching deer and the like - are dusted down. Flimsy spinings out of fantasy - such as Anthony Burgess's fancifulings about Will ("auburn hair, melting eyes") paying court to a "comely" girl "sweet as May and shy as a fawn" - are brushed aside. The researches of earlier biographers receive generous and sometimes hilarious attention as in a section summarizing William Rufus Chetwood's efforts to establish whether or not Sir William Davenant was Shakespeare's illegitimate son: scrutinizing the frontispiece portrait to the Restoration poet's *Works* for resemblances to Shakespeare, Chetwood "found himself handicapped by the fact that Davenant had lost his nose as a result of mercury treatment for the pox" ("the want of a Nose", the thwarted researcher complained, "gives an odd Cast to the Face"). Tirelessly exhaustive, Schoenbaum's book reconstructs Elizabethan and Jacobean society in London and Stratford on a large scale and in lively detail. Against this background, it vividly puts together the most readable and reliable life of Shakespeare we are likely to get.

Technologies of truth-seeking

L. Jonathan Cohen

LEWIS EDWIN HAHN and PAUL ARTHUR SCHILLIP (Editors)
The Philosophy of W. V. Quine
705pp. La Salle, IL: Open Court.
0026-90109
W.V. QUINE
The Time of My Life: An autobiography
499pp. MIT. £21.50.
0262 170035

The triumphs of modern experimental science have invested empiricism philosophy with enormous prestige. Eyesight has displaced reason, revelation or tradition as the ultimate arbiter of cognitive respectability. But empiricism was never without its own problems. The laws of logic seem prior to any empirical subject-matter on which they are exercised. Mathematical knowledge seems to rest on stronger foundations than the frailties of human observation. Even Nature itself seems scarcely intelligible until we learn about its sub-visible structures - its sub-atomic particles or electromagnetic waves, its viruses or its fields of force.

Among native-born Americans no philosopher has come to grips more closely with these problems, or wrestled with them more influentially, than Willard Van Orman Quine. Born in Akron, Ohio, of Manx, Dutch, German and British-American descent, he began his studies in analytical philosophy as an autodidact at Oberlin College where he graduated in 1930. Excited by the ideas of Russell, Peano, Couturat and the like he moved to Harvard for his Ph.D. But, although Whitehead, Sheffer and C. I. Lewis were teaching there, the centre of academic gravity for logical analysis and the philosophy of mathematics was then still in Europe. So Quine spent the academic year 1932-3 in Vienna, Prague and Warsaw, getting to know the leading figures of that great period of logico-analytical enlightenment in central Europe. In particular he met Carnap, Schlick, Weissmann, Reichenbach, Gödel, Tarski, Lukasiewicz and Lesniewski. He attended their seminars or talked privately with them, and in the process his own ideas about logic and the foundations of mathematics began to crystallize. A. J. Ayer was attending meetings of the Vienna Circle at the same time. But, while Ayer returned to Oxford to write, in his *Language, Truth and Logic*, a brilliantly systematic and powerful development of the themes that were central to Vienna Circle discussions, Quine returned to Boston to plough - no less influentially - his own furrow.

A helpful way to begin to understand Quine's work is to see it as stemming originally from the reaction of an outstandingly clear-headed and critical thinker, with a naturally pragmatic turn of mind, to the writings of Russell, Lewis and Carnap about logic and the philosophy of mathematics. And we can see this both in the style and in the content of Quine's philosophizing.

So far as his style is concerned, rigour and elegance have always been equally important objectives. For example, he early came to insist on the importance of logicians always distinguishing carefully between the use of an expression and its mention, as when the expression "Boston" is used in the sentence "Boston is populous" and mentioned in "Boston is disyllabic." No doubt the distinction is trivial and obvious enough when place-names like "Boston" are at issue. But confusion is a lot easier when such things as mathematical functions, say, or variables are under examination. If we say that probability is a dyadic function, is that a statement about the word "probability" or about a property that events may have? Despite Frege's warnings, Russell and Lewis undoubtedly succumbed to confusions about issues of this kind on many occasions.

Nor were such lapses a merely superficial matter, and their correction just a piece of pedantry. The art of logic, as traditionally conceived, consists in formalization, so that perplexing questions about the consistency of thoughts or the validity of reasonings may be resolved by rules for the manipulation of symbols - of visible marks on paper. But any rules of this kind must be "perceptually unequivocal", or the whole purpose of the enterprise is endangered. And logicians owe to Quine the reminder that only if his insistence on the use

mention distinction but also of many other improvements in logical technique. Indeed, as he himself recognizes, it is on this kind of quasi-pedagogical issue - rather than in the proving of fundamental new theorems - that Quine has made his major contribution to mathematical logic.

Russell had claimed that, in the end, all mathematical concepts were definable in terms of logical ones and all mathematical truths provable from logical ones. Thus mathematics, like logic, described no facts, either physical or metaphysical, and postulated no objects. But in their monumental attempt to display the correctness of this claim, Russell and Whitehead found it necessary to introduce certain assumptions (type theory, axiom of infinity, etc) that seemed foreign to purely logical considerations, and Gödel subsequently demonstrated that not every arithmetical truth is even provable. So the overall problem to which Quine has addressed himself in the philosophy of mathematics has been an ontological one. If after all mathematics is not just a branch of topic-neutral logic and there is something specific that has to be said to be what mathematics is actually about - ie, if there is something that arithmetical propositions are ultimately true of - then what is this subject-matter and to what principles does it conform? Quine has progressively refined his answer to this question in terms of assumptions about the existence and properties of sets or classes.

Carnap, of course, attached just as much importance to logical rigour as Quine did. In particular, Carnap took over the core of Kant's logical distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments. Analytic propositions, like "Cousins share at least one grandparent", were supposed to be true in virtue of the meanings of their terms, while synthetic propositions, like "George is Mary's cousin", were supposed to be true in virtue of facts about the world. And Carnap, like most other analytical philosophers of his generation, coupled this distinction with an epistemological distinction between propositions that are empirically verifiable or falsifiable and propositions of which the truth or falsity is discoverable *a priori*. The assertion that there are no synthetic *a priori* truths was then a way of rejecting not only traditional doctrines about the existence of God or the immortality of the soul but also Kantian metaphysics about the structure of knowable reality. But Quine sought, in effect, to pull the rug out from under this logical positivist position. There are no effective criteria for sameness of meaning, he argued, so that the concept of analyticity cannot be satisfactorily defined; at the same time, the sentences that we believe true constitute an interlocking web, so that no single sentence or group of sentences can be said to be true just in virtue of meanings or just in virtue of facts. All we can say, on his view, is that our beliefs meet the "tribunal of experience" as a corporate whole. We are more reluctant to recall some beliefs than others. But none are in principle *a priori* or necessary.

Thus in Quine's philosophy two classical dichotomies were replaced by a single quasi-psychological parameter. The semantical distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, and the epistemological distinction between empirical and *a priori* ones, were replaced by the homogenization of our beliefs and the gradation of our reluctance to change them.

Various connected theses have been developed by Quine in his extensive writings on the philosophy of logic and language. For example, he has argued forcefully that, beyond a certain limited point, the notion of translation into, or out of, a wholly exotic language does not make any clear sense. And he has also argued that the concepts of possibility and necessity pose very serious problems for anyone who wishes to construct a coherent account of their logic. But, more than to any particular view that he has defended, Quine has owed his influence and reputation to the invariable sharpness of his critical insights, to the lapidary English in which he has expounded them, and to the omnipresent backing of his formal expertise.

Quine richly deserves the honour of inclusion in "The Library of Living Philosophers" series that Paul Schilpp started to edit in 1939. In this series the philosopher concerned leads

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off with an intellectual autobiography, and a considerable number of critical essays follow, to which the subject himself replies. An opportunity is thus given for a definitive clarification of the philosopher's views and for canonical criticisms by some of his leading opponents, and a comprehensive bibliography is appended. Such a volume is especially useful in Quine's case, not only because of the frequency with which he claims to have been misinterpreted, but also because of the opportunity that the volume presents to appraise the internal coherence of his philosophy. His intellectual autobiography is particularly fascinating, too, because of the relatively large number of other philosophers with whom he has interacted, and the close connections that many of these interactions have with Quine's subsequent writings.

This autobiography is a useful digest of the book that was published a year earlier under the title of *The Time of My Life*, since the latter gives the impression of being a comprehensive sequence of diary jottings that must have been considerably more fun to write than they are now to read. Perhaps that book will be a useful source of data for future historians of twentieth-century academic culture. Or perhaps it will just remain as a monument to the extensiveness of Quine's travels, which are all recorded in it.

Many different issues of detail are taken up by Quine's critics in the Schilpp volume, and their variety of topic reflects the richness of Quine's own writings. What the volume lacks, however, is a careful overview of Quine's whole position, written from within the analytical camp. Henry Skolimowski's essay does indeed include some general discussion of analytical philosophy, but it is oracular and unconstructive and often unrelated to Quine's personal contribution.

An adequate overview would need to investigate closely the extent to which Quine's ideas about the method of his philosophical enterprise are coherent with the substance of his philosophical doctrine. For example, much of his philosophizing about mathematics and science, like Carnap's, is concerned with the nature of the linguistic and ontological provisions that would need to be made if currently accepted mathematical and scientific theories were rewritten in a logically perspicuous notation. And in discussing alternative proposals for analysing or explicating the logic of indirect discourse, he remarks of one such analytical sentence that it "well enough serves any purpose of" a certain natural-language sentence "that seems worth serving". Philosophical explication consists, he says (in *Word and Object*), in finding "a way of accomplishing those same purposes through other channels, using other and less troublesome forms of expression". Or again "we fix on the particular functions of the unclear expression that make it worth troubling about, and then devise a substitute, clear and couched in terms of our liking, that fills those functions".

Quine does indeed deny that sameness of sentential purpose, or function, is to be identified with synonymy. But he has never offered any argument to show that the concept of synonymy which defenders of analyticity require is any different from the concept of sameness of sentential purpose, or function, that his own account of philosophical explication requires. No doubt purposes may be compared with one another in different ways, and sentences that would normally be uttered with the same purpose in one context may be uttered with a different purpose in another context. But exactly the same is true of synonymy. Sentences that are synonymous with one another in one context of utterance may not be so in another. So analyticity is never a property of a sentence on its own, but only of a sentence in a particular type of context.

In short, if your philosophical methodology includes analytical reconstruction as one of its techniques or objectives, you cannot dispense altogether with the concept of analyticity. It must be available to deal with meanings that are at least as sophisticated as those with which your philosophical analyses are dealing. You may make this concept of analyticity a matter of degree. You may allow its use only in certain contexts of semantic discussion and not in others. But if you can find no room at all for it in your thoughts, you cannot consistently

propose a philosophical programme of analytical reconstruction.

Whatever the respective merits of their substantive analyses, Carnap, Schlick, Hempel, Reichenbach and Ayer adopted a coherent position on this issue. By retaining the analytic-synthetic dichotomy they underpinned their conception of philosophy as logical analysis. But Quine's own position on this issue was not a coherent one. And his views about analyticity interlock closely with his critique of modal logic and his thesis about the indeterminacy of translation. Hence he cannot just brush off the issue as a peripheral or unimportant one. Certainly he cites no empirical data that help to confirm the accuracy of his own analytical reconstructions as against those of other modern philosophers of science or mathematics. So when he claims that his own analytical sentences have the same purpose, or function, as those of the theories analysed – not just the same truth-value – his claim seems to be an *a priori* one and, if true, to be necessarily true.

A defender of Quine here might urge that sameness of purpose is a matter for psychologists to determine, and that Quine has long held that epistemology – the philosophy of knowledge – should be treated just as a branch of psychology. On this view epistemology is continuous with the natural sciences: epistemology issues in psychological hypotheses (about the sameness of purpose of certain kinds of linguistic utterances) to stand alongside physical, chemical and biological hypotheses. But a thus "naturalized" epistemology, as Quine calls it, is scarcely discoverable in the journals and textbooks of experimental psychology. And, if Quine had indeed as much respect for the views of psychological scientists as he evidently has for the views of physicists, chemists and biologists, he would not suppose that laymen were able to supplanted experts over so large and important an area of research as that covered by epistemology. Certainly he himself cites no psychological experiments in support of his epistemological or analytical theories. The nearest he gets to doing this is when he invokes his own intuitions about how a term functions in ordinary, unreflective usage. But one person's intuitions afford a notoriously inappropriate test of scientific hypotheses.

Quine's naturalization of epistemology has also been criticized on the ground that it overlooks the normative implications which many

epistemological theses have. An analytical reconstruction of a piece of scientific research, for example, may embody the claim that such-and-such experimental data support, confirm or justify a particular hypothesis. So in his reply to Morton White in the present volume he argues that in fact his conception of epistemology "does not jettison the normative and settle for the indiscriminate description of ongoing procedures". For Quine "normative epistemology is a branch of engineering". It is "the technology of truth-seeking... or prediction", and epistemological merit is to be evaluated in terms of efficiency for this ulterior end. Of course, there is a *prima facie* inconsistency here between the thesis that epistemology is a branch of psychology and the thesis that it is a branch of engineering. But presumably Quine means that, just as the technology of mechanical engineering is founded on the science of mechanics, so the technology of knowledge-production is founded on the science of psychology.

But an analytical reconstruction of, say, arithmetic might come out rather badly if judged in these terms, even if it had considerable philosophical interest. Consider Quine's own reconstruction, which is based on set-theoretical foundations. Most people, in most contexts, find the search for quantitative truths or predictions much easier if they can use numerals, rather than complex set-theoretical jargon, for recording their measurements and conducting their calculations. Similarly, engineers do not build up their bridges by assembling iron molecules when they have iron girders ready to hand. So it looks as though Quine's own research for the reconstruction of number theory on a set-theoretical basis must have other goals than those served by the technology of truth-seeking and prediction.

Moreover, though the quest for a technology of prediction was vigorously pursued in the seventeenth century by philosophers like Bacon and Leibniz, epistemology tends to advertise different objectives today. A royal road to scientific discovery would be fine to have, and some enthusiasts for artificial intelligence, like H. A. Simon in his book *Models of Discovery* (1977), still claim its possibility. But in practice most contemporary epistemologists are content to settle for a theory about evidential justification, plus a passing reference to the imaginativeness that good scientists exercise in

thinking up novel hypotheses. So, if Quine's analogy were valid and engineering was really like normative epistemology, we should have a lot of knowledge about how to test bridges but very little about how to build them.

Another way to put the same point is to contrast evaluations of the product with prescriptions for the process of production. Both kinds of judgment are legitimately entitled normative. But they nevertheless differ from one another in important respects. The motorist who considers whether to buy a particular model of car needs to know how well it would satisfy his requirements in use, whereas the team that produces it needs to know how it is to be assembled from its components. The optimal structure of a product need not reflect the optimal strategy for its production. Analogously normative epistemology may seek to establish the requirements that a good prediction, say, or a good explanation should satisfy within a certain type of scientific enquiry. But useful recipes for conducting such an enquiry are a different matter – a topic for methodology rather than epistemology and a topic that is often more fruitfully discussed by scientists than by philosophers.

What lies behind Quine's scientific account of philosophical analysis? Two factors seem to be particularly influential.

One of them is Quine's overriding urge to economize and homogenize his ontology. We can draw a comparison here with David Hume. For Hume the only ultimately assured realities were states of consciousness, and on the basis of these he tried to explain how we come to believe, though without rational justification, in the existence of such a variety of other things – physical objects, causal processes, personal identity, moral values, and so on. And of course the ontology is too jejune and the system bursts at the seams. Quine's empiricism leads him into a similar, though more sophisticated, enterprise. Physical objects, in his view, are posited in order to explain our sensations. Statements about numbers are reducible to statements about sets. And it is in line with such economies and simplifications that philosophical statements are continuous with other scientific statements. Indeed in one book (*Theories and Things*, 1981) he even reduces physical objects to sets. That is, he envisages a canonical language in which statements about physical objects are replaced by statements ascribing appropriate physical properties to corresponding space-time regions, which are then identified by corresponding classes of quadruples of numbers according to some arbitrarily adopted system of co-ordinates. "We are left", says Quine, "with just the ontology of pure set theory, since the numbers and their quadruples can be modeled within it."

The other particularly influential factor that underlies Quine's scientific account is his pragmatism. Again and again, whether in logic, in mathematics, in natural science, or in linguistics, the standard of satisfactoriness which he respects is that of efficiency for the purpose in hand. The truth is what "works". And in this perspective the distinction between science as a product and science as a process of production is inevitably blurred. Whichever of the two aspects of science we have in mind, the criterion of merit will be the same – long-run success in achieving appropriate purposes. But however attractive such a pragmatism may at first sight appear, it suffers from an unavoidable regress. To say that *x* will continue indefinitely to achieve *y* is itself to make a prediction, and if the truth of that prediction is to be evaluated in turn by reference to its efficacy, the regress is infinite. Perhaps some philosophers are ready to pay this price for their pragmatism. But a different theory of truth may be less expensive.

There is much else to be said about Quine's philosophy. His bibliography in the volume edited by Hahn and Schilpp runs to eighteen octavo pages, and includes seventeen books as well as very many articles. But even those who do not agree with Quine's principal theses cannot fail to admire their originality and the persistence with which he has developed and defended them. Nor can they fail to be impressed by the attention that has been so widely paid to Quine's ideas within the analytical movement during the past fifty years. He is one of the dozen or so most important philosophers of the present century.

From the snakes, and from the giant tortoises,
The indomitable Galapagos themselves,
As they lurched and lumbered their way inland
Following their ancient paths to water.

Yet in all this now weird, it was the beak
Of brown finches that dismayed FitzRoy,
And sent him on his solitary way
To slash a red equator round his throat.

NEIL CURRY

Galapagos

With FitzRoy's twenty-two chronometers
Ticking on their shelves, Darwin, sick again,
Killed time re-reading Lyell's *Geology*.
Or *Paradise Lost* – his favourite poem.

On deck the crew were plump and happy now.
Roast armadillo and ostrich dumplings
Had brought them round Cape Horn, and the Beagle,
Under full sail, was tacking for the Line.

But charting that long, sheep's jaw-bone of a coast
Could not assuage the zealot in FitzRoy.
To substantiate the Flood, evidence
For Genesis: that was what he wanted.

When they landed, Antediluvian:
Was at every turn, but nowhere Eden;
Not in such heat; not with such contortions
Of cinder and lava; and not with such

Black lumps of Hell as the iguanas
Crawling and slithering about these Blighted
Encantadas – these Enchanted Islands,
Where the chief sound of life was a hiss –

From the snakes, and from the giant tortoises,
The indomitable Galapagos themselves,
As they lurched and lumbered their way inland
Following their ancient paths to water.

Yet in all this now weird, it was the beak
Of brown finches that dismayed FitzRoy,
And sent him on his solitary way
To slash a red equator round his throat.

NEIL CURRY

Tales within tales

Jennifer Westwood

KEVIN CROSSLEY-HOLLAND
British Folk Tales: New versions
383pp. Orchard. £12.95.
185213 0210

Always exact in his scholarship, Kevin Crossley-Holland calls his tales "new versions". So, indeed, some of them are: he has set "The Small-Tooth Dog" – a "Beauty and the Beast" variant collection by S. O. Addy in Derbyshire in the nineteenth century – in present-day London, and under the title "Sea-Woman" made a tale within a tale of Thomas Keightley's "The Mermaid Wife" (1802).

His changes from his sources, meticulously recorded in his notes, are those of a fine storyteller with a poet's ear: where he finds an already grand tale, he lets it pretty well alone. As in his earlier collection *The Dead Moon* (1982), he scarcely intervenes between the reader and Mrs Balfour's tales from the Lincolnshire cars, of which the title story and "Valley Brown" in that collection, and "Samuel's Ghost" in this, are among the earliest things in British tradition. He doesn't indulge in eye-boggling semi-phonetic spelling – the bane of many regional retellings – but reproduces the cadence of a dialect tale largely through its grammar. In "Tom Tit Tot", the Suffolk "Rumpelstiltskin", for example, he preserves the characteristic East Anglian "that" for "it".

The publisher's blurb describes the book as "the first comprehensive retelling of the great body of British Folk Tales for very many years" – a large claim, as the "body" of British folk-tales is greater than the publisher allows and, thanks largely to the School of Scottish Studies, is still growing. None the less this selection of fifty-five stories is the most representative by a modern reteller. It includes examples of most of the main types of British folk-tale, and reproduces them in both prose and ballad form, traditional or otherwise – the Border ballad of "Tam Lin" is included, so is the riddle-contest "The False Knight on the Road", and the West Country song "Sir John Barleycorn", with its mysterious undertones of primitive sacrifice. Unlike most retellers, Crossley-Holland is no more afraid of the in-

consequential snippet than he is of the fully developed narrative that gives scope for larger effects. What he makes of very slight tales such as "Dathera Dad" is often a revelation.

Considered simply as storytelling, "The Small-Tooth Dog", fast-paced to begin with, has never been better done nor, under different titles, have "A Legend of Knockgraffon" and "The Brownie of Copinsay". The latter, retitled "Hughbo" (which is the Brownie's name), is retold from a shortish paraphrase in Ernest Marwick's *Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* (1975) and is a fine example of sensitive handling. Art, insight and wide reading have gone into its making: it becomes a little tragedy, the more intimate note sounded by its ending prepared for from the first by that apparently small thing, a change of title.

If the collection has a fault, it is that responsiveness to words sometimes carries the author too far. The emphasis in traditional storytelling is on narrative and narrative devices such as repetition, not on freshness and originality of vocabulary. The "gritty chuckle of the quernstones" is fair enough – very few of us have heard a quern in action – but I'm not at all sure about "silver-roan forests" or an "oyster-and-pearl afternoon". This kind of highly wrought language seems inappropriate in a folk-tale context, as, too, are a few of the stories. "The Wildman" is a highly original retelling (from the Wildman's point of view) of Ralph of Coggeshall's account of the capture of a merman off Orford in the twelfth century – but its tone is far removed from that of folk-tale. "The Green Children", from the same source, sits uneasily among stories with the timeless quality of traditional folk and fairy tale because of too much contextualizing medieval detail. This occasionally swamps even "The Pedlar of Swaffham", an otherwise first-class version which introduces as a character a marvellous pedlar's dog not mentioned in the original story.

But this is little enough to complain about. Just as the same author's *Folk Tales of the British Isles* (1985) was an excellent introduction to the subject for adults, so is this for children. The book is generously produced, and its stories enhanced with atmospheric and frequently sinister woodcuts by Peter Melnyk-zuk – see, for example, those for "The Dark Horseman" and the "King of the Cats".

The road to Avalon

Heather O'Donoghue

PHILIP NEIL
The Tale of Sir Gawain
Illustrated by Charles Keeping
103pp. Cambridge: Lutterworth. £6.95.
07188 2670 1

The Tale of Sir Gawain is a re-telling of Arthurian legend through the person of Sir Gawain. As he lies wounded, encamped outside Lancelot's castle in France, impotently vowing revenge on Lancelot for the murder of his brothers, Gawain looks back to the birth of Arthur and recounts to his young squire various episodes concerning Arthur and his knights.

There are some striking advantages to be gained from presenting the material as the reminiscences of Sir Gawain. Memories of the idealism of the fellowship of the Round Table are poignantly framed by the present bitter hatred for Lancelot. Having returned to England and been wounded in the last battle between Arthur and Mordred, the dying man recognizes that his leaving England on a fruitless revenge mission with Arthur has provided Mordred with the opportunity to seize the kingdom, and his final vision is of the death of Arthur on the battlefield.

The narration also gives a certain unity to what is actually a collection of disparate Arthurian stories from various sources. Neil Philip relates heavily on Malory, but has also included material from other medieval works such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Libeaus Desconus*, the *Mabinogion* and the Irish *Bulle Suibhne*. He has devised some neat links between these different stories: Gawain is still smarting from being tempted by the beauty of

Sir Bertilak's wife when he agrees to marry the loathly lady for whom King Arthur has rashly promised a knightly husband, so that his action takes the form of a conscious penance.

But there are drawbacks to the first-person narration. There can be no description of King Arthur's final moments – the full *Morte* with Excalibur and the white-samite-clad hand, and Arthur's last journey to Avalon, for instance. The account of the Grail is weak, largely because Gawain is recounting events at second-hand. More damagingly, Gawain's naturalistic, even homely attempt to make sense of human motives and feelings in this most stylized and artificial of fictional worlds can seem out of place. Lancelot, for example, is described as Gawain's "best friend" – a curiously ordinary relationship for Round Table Knights – and Gawain's speculation that this was perhaps because "he was the only one who didn't need anything from me" sounds a discordant note of popular psychology.

Neil Philip also has Gawain ponder the sexual attraction between Lancelot and Guinevere. There is a disconcerting silliness in his imagery – Guinevere is compared to a filly, whose nostrils flare at the sight of her lover and this also raises the question of whether Arthurian material treated in a serious, novelistic way results in material suitable for children. Arthurian legend has long been appropriated as children's literature, but this only really works if modern versions stick to the surface attractions of magic, adventure, chivalry and doom. It is hard to see what age group Neil Philip's novel might appeal to, with its adulterous passions and secret incest. Charles Keeping's illustrations are very beautiful, but reflect the same dilemma: his knights are noble and his monsters hideous, but his maidens, with their thinly draped breasts and realistic curves, are strongly sensual.

Making it real

Dominic Hibberd

ANNE HARVEY (Editor)
In Time of War: War poetry
160pp. Blackie. £8.95 (paperback, £4.95).
021692103 1

This anthology of war poetry for young people is published "in association with the Imperial War Museum". It will make a thought-provoking souvenir for young visitors to the Museum, far preferable to the books about tanks and aeroplanes which children often seem to go for in the well-stocked shop in the basement. Anne Harvey has chosen numerous poems about children, civilians and wartime life in Britain, leaving comparatively little space for descriptions of front-line experience. Similarly the more "difficult" works, such as "Dead Man's Dump" and "Strange Meeting", are omitted, and there are very few long pieces, except for Herbert Read's "The Execution of Cornelius Vane", a welcome inclusion. The book is limited to the two World Wars, the only wars which have involved literary people in large numbers; more verse was written in those few years than will ever be fully recorded, but the bibliographical work of Catherine Reilly has made large areas of it accessible. With the help of Reilly's books, including her two anthologies of verse by women, Harvey has found some unfamiliar material to set alongside well-known poems. She has also given much more space to women than was conventional in the days, still very recent, when anthologists limited themselves to accepted names and believed that virtually all war poets were men.

Anthologies invite quibbling. Young readers might have liked more narratives. No tears for Robert Nichols, but where is E. A. Mackintosh, that extraordinary champion of "war, the liberator"? Not everyone will be satisfied with "1914", "The Last Laugh", "Conscious" and

"Futility" as an adequate sample of Owen. His "Dulce et Decorum Est", over-anthologized though it may be, is a far better rendering of a gas attack than the banal piece by one Erno Muller printed here; if Muller was German, that might be grounds for choosing his poem, but Anne Harvey admits to knowing nothing about him. Keyes and Rosenberg are allowed one poem each, Douglas two, Owen and Alun Lewis four and Sassoon six, but the surprise winner is W. W. Gibson with eight. Gibson's simple formulae make him a good choice for this book, but the absence of chronological information conceals his importance as one of the very first Great War poets to write without grand rhetoric about the sufferings of the common soldier. (He was still writing away in the Second War, but the three specimens given here depressingly confirm the usual view that he never advanced beyond his early work; his little piece about the patriotic bull charging an invading parachutist is one of the few poems in this book which one would rather not have read.)

Harvey organizes her material in a rough thematic sequence for each war, but takes no account of the way in which poetry developed at the time. A late poem by Sassoon precedes some of his earlier work. Sorley follows Rosenberg. Her book constitutes a modern view rather than a historical representation of war poetry as it actually was. Her introduction reveals little about her intentions, but one gathers that she wants to make war "real", not to make it history. The first section opens with Vernon Scannell's "The Great War" and the second includes two post-war holocaust poems, translated from Polish, to commemorate a subject which few English-speaking poets can have known about at the time (anthologists do not yet feel obliged to take similar note of, say, Stalingrad or Dresden). This is a very readable and moving book but it makes no claim to be, and should not be regarded as a guide to the nature and development of British poetry during the two wars.

THE TIMES A prize for Paris



In 1896 Edmond de Goncourt (left) bequeathed money in trust for an annual literary prize to be funded in memory of his brother Jules (right). Now the Prix Goncourt, though only 50 francs, is worth a fortune in book sales to the winner. On Monday, as all Paris awaits this year's result, *The Times* looks at the Goncourt phenomenon

... and regularly in *The Times*, Bernard Levin on the way we live now, Frances Gibb on the law, John Clare on education, Jane MacQuitty on wine, Peter Ackroyd on books, Barbara Amiel's viewpoint, Paul Griffiths on music, Philip Howard on words, the humour of Mel Calman and Barry Fantoni, the unique *Times* crossword... and much more each week



THE TIMES
A lion among paper tigers (25p)

Criminal proceedings

T. J. Blyon

COLINDUNNE
Hooligan
281pp. Secker and Warburg. £10.95.
0476 139588

Ex-SAS man Joe "High-Risk" Hussy is called away from the orphan hodgehog he is fostering to look for Richard Noble, the missing brother of schoolmaster Charles. The trail is not too easy to follow, taking him from a Gurkha camp in the Home Counties, via a society beauty in a flat off Doughty Street, to a nest of urban guerrillas in Liverpool, and ending up in the snows of Alberta, Canada. International terrorists, intelligence agencies and unlikely coups at *chemin de fer* are also involved. Tough, but with a sentimental centre like hodgehog-loving Hussy himself, the book races along at a pace which makes questions of credibility or plausibility irrelevant.

NANCY PICKARD
No Body
228pp. Collins. £9.95.
0002321351

Jenny Cain, director of the Civic Foundation in the small town of Port Frederick, Mass, finds herself solving two mysteries simultaneously. First, where are all the bodies of the townspeople's ancestors, which have mysteriously vanished from the historic Union Hill Cemetery, used as a burial ground from 1848 to 1886? And, second, who has killed a secretary at the Harbor Lights Funeral Home and stashed the body in a coffin already occupied by a funeral director of the same establishment? Light and amusing, if not always totally credible.

MARTIN LONG
The Dark Gateway
191pp. Macmillan. £8.95.
0333 455444

Joshua Bennington, a rich and prominent member of society in Sydney in the early 1890s, is clubbed to death outside his home late one evening. His wife, his daughter and his nephew, all of whom profit from his death, are the most obvious suspects, but the case is not an easy one, and Detective Inspector Keats calls in a retired colleague, the eccentric Tom Cotter, to assist him. Well-constructed mystery, set in an atmospherically impressive late-nineteenth-century Sydney.

MICHAEL UNDERWOOD
The Injudicious Judge
170pp. Macmillan. £8.95.
0333 433653

Nobody likes Judge Celia Kilby, so it's hardly a surprise when she gets a threatening letter; but the police are slightly astonished when she's

found in her garden a few days later with a kitchen knife stuck in her back. Solicitor Rosa Fipton, who has appeared in a number of Michael Underwood's books, unwillingly becomes involved, and in the time she can spare from a steamy affair with fellow-lawyer Peter Chen, sorts out the mystery for the police. Neat, unassuming and highly professional.

SARA PARETSKY
Bitter Medicine
321pp. Gollancz. £10.95.
0575 040947

After taking a sixteen-year-old pregnant girl to a private hospital where she dies in childbirth, V. I. Warshawski, Chicago's best-known female private investigator, involuntarily gets involved in the investigation of one part of the private medical system, uncovering in the process a rank and seamy mess of greed and corruption. More solid, more thoughtful, more credible and better organized than the earlier Warshawski stories, *Bitter Medicine* lifts Sara Paretsky immediately into a different league. But her heroine still spends rather too much time thinking about her clothes. And why does she always fall for the wrong guy?

HUGH McLEAVE
Under the Icefall
160pp. Gollancz. £9.95.
0575 040793

Brodie and Shanne, hero and heroine of Hugh McLeave's earlier books, are still leading an idyllic existence in a remote Himalayan valley when Cready-Smythe, Brodie's former controller, suddenly turns up and asks them to help him search for an RAF transport plane which, laden with gold, crashed on a glacier in August 1945. Also after the cargo are the Chinese and Pakistani governments, and the fanatical Grayling, an adventurer who has been dreaming of the treasure most of his life. Good adventure story with plenty of action and a highly convincing Himalayan background.

NANCY LIVINGSTON
Incident at Parga
214pp. Gollancz. £9.95.
0575 040777

Retired tax inspector Mr Pringle, hero of Nancy Livingston's two previous novels, is taken by his nephew Matthew and Matthew's rich new girlfriend, Liz, on a flotilla sailing holiday among the Ionian islands. During a stop at the picturesque little port of Parga, on the Greek mainland, Mr Pringle discovers Liz's body floating in the sea. The Greek police decide that her death was an accident. Mr Pringle disagrees and, on his return to England, devotes his time and his ratiocative faculties to solving the mystery. Mr Pringle is a happily conceived character, and the book has plenty of life and humour, though it is put together in a slightly slapdash manner.

AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 355
Readers are invited to identify the source of the three quotations which follow, and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than December 4. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers received, up to that date, on failing that the most nearly correct - in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration. Entries, marked "Author, Author 355" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BN. The solution and results will appear in our December 11.

1 "I can see it now as clearly as I can see you. There was a face at the window, the face of a child, sort of floating there. It was staring into the pub. It had a kind of pleading look, and it was so white, white as an aspen. It was staring right at me."

2 He was not unaware - for in one or two instances, he had experienced the fact - that sometimes a man may wear a passing countenance in the street, which shall irresistibly and magnetically affect him, for a moment, as wholly unknown to him and yet strangely reminiscent of some vague face he has previously encountered, in some far-distant time, but of extreme interest to his life.

3 "Have ye not seen sometime a pale face, Awaiting a press of him that hath be led, Toward his death, when at him put no grace, And such a death in his face hath had, As a man's face might have when he is dead."

Men myght knowe his face was fished, Amonges alle the faces in that route?

Competition No 354
Winners: Alistair and Barbara Elliot (winners)

1 I Flush with the pond the lurid furnace burn'd At eve, while smoke and vapour fill'd the yard; The gloomy winter sky was dimly star'd, The (by-wheel) with a mellow murmur turn'd, While, ever rising on its mystic stair, In the dim light, from secret chambers hence, The stars of harvest, sever'd from the turn, Climb'd, and fell over, in the mucky air.

2 The unbreathing engine marks no time, Steady as sunrise, steady as dawn, Invention, perfect, saving time, And saving measure, and saving rhyme, And did our Ruskitt speak no word? Alice Meynell, "The Threshing Machine"

3 I Chase under the eaves of the stack, and as yet barely stubble, was the red (yacht) that the women had come to serve - a timber-framed construction, with straps and wheels appearing - the threshing-machine which, whilst it was going, kept up a despot's demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves. Thomas Hardy, *Text of the D'Urbervilles*, chapter 47.

TLS LISTINGS

The TLS Listings provides full publication details of those books received each week by the TLS which seem to fall within the main interests of our readers. Children's books, foreign-language books and paperback reprints of recent works are not, however, included. Publishers are asked to ensure that they let us have all the necessary information, including price and publication date.

Architecture

Montagu de Beaulieu, Edward English Heritage
Macdonald. 280pp.; plates. £17.50. 0 356 12773 7.
5/11/87.

Art

Bailey, David, and Martin Harrison The Naked Eye: Great photographs of the nude
Barrie and Jenkins. 192pp.; plates. £16.95. 0 7126 1659 4.
9/11/87.

Becker, John Pattern and Loom: A practical study of the development of weaving techniques in China, Western Asia and Europe (with paperback supplement)
Rhodos International, Lockend, Shipshape, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon RG9 3LX. 316pp.; illus. Dkr298.
£7245 151 3.

Fernigier, André Pierre Bonnard, concise edition (1st pub 1969)
Thames and Hudson. 127pp.; plates. £12.95.
0 500 08028 1. 9/11/87.

Graham, Will Paul Klee, concise edition (1st pub 1967)
Thames and Hudson. 127pp.; plates. £12.95.
0 500 08029 1. 9/11/87.

Hart, Frederick David by the Hand of Michelangelo: The original model discovered
Thames and Hudson. 144pp.; plates. £25. 0 500 23503 1.
9/11/87.

Holme, Bryan Medieval Pageant
Thames and Hudson. 104pp.; plates. £12.95.
0 500 04121 3. 10/11/87.

Hogg, Michel Paul Gauguin: Life and work
Thames and Hudson. 332pp.; plates. £75. 0 500 09184 6.
9/11/87.

Marty, Diana de Louis XIV and Versailles (Costume and Civilization)
Baufoff. 144pp.; illus. £14.95. 0 7134 5364 8. 24/11/87.

Newman, Harold An Illustrated Dictionary of Silverware
Thames and Hudson. 367pp.; plates. £25. 0 500 23456 6.
10/11/87.

Ormond, Richard, and Carol Blackett-Ord Franz Xaver Winterhalter and the Courts of Europe 1830-70
National Portrait Gallery. 240pp.; plates. £35 (hardcover).
£12.95 (paperback). 0 904017 84 2 (hc). 0 904017 83 4 (pb). 24/11/87.

Reep, Edward A Combat Artist in World War II
Kenrick UP, dist by Harper and Row. 206pp.; illus. £17.95. 0 8131 1602 3. 9/87.

Sains and Ste-Devils: Images of women in the 15th and 16th centuries
Robinson. 57 Cornwall Gardens, London SW9 4BE.
153pp.; plates. £9.95 (paperback). 0 948925 06 4.
9/11/87.

Sylvester, David The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon, enlarged edition (1st pub 1975)
Thames and Hudson. 206pp.; illus. £8.95 (paperback).
0 500 27475 4. 23/11/87.

Tredici, Robert Del At Work in the Fields of the Bomb
Harrap. 192pp.; plates. £9.95 (paperback). 0 245 54600 6.
11/11/87.

Waldoff, Frank Expressionist Portraits
Thames and Hudson. 200pp.; plates. £20. 0 500 23494 9.
10/11/87.

Wolfe, Richard Painting as an Art
Thames and Hudson. 384pp.; plates. £28. 0 500 23495 7.
2/11/87.

Wolfe, Richard Painting as an Art
Thames and Hudson. 384pp.; plates. £28. 0 500 23495 7.
2/11/87.

Bibliography
Barker, Nicolas The Butterfly Books: An enquiry into the nature of certain twentieth-century pamphlets
Rout. 285pp.; plates. £42. 0 854000 24 0. 4/11/87.

Gerard, David John Wain: A bibliography
Newell. 233pp. £40. 0 7201 1856 5. 23/10/87.

Biography, letters and diaries
Bewley, William H., and Judith Ewell, editors The Human Tradition in Latin America: The twentieth century
Scholarly Resources, 104 Greenwich Avenue, Wokingham RG40 3JL. 212pp. £15 (hardcover). £12.95 (paperback).
0 8520 2341 5 (hc). 0 8520 2342 3 (pb). 15/11/87.

Davis, Russell, and Liz Huttaway memoir by Michael Secker and Warburg. 192pp.; illus. £9.95 (paperback).
0 434 44719 3. 10/11/87.

Finkel, George, translated by Kathleen Seamus My Happy Days in Hell (1st pub 1962)
Corgi. 471pp. £4.95 (paperback). 0 532 99271 2. 10/11/87.

Lake, Laurie Portrait of an Artist: A biography of Georgia O'Keeffe
Helmman. 379pp.; illus. £16.95. 0 434 42716 0. 30/11/87.

Maitland, Barry Adventures on the Way to Paradise
Eon Top. 132pp.; illus. £8.95. 0 211 11846 2. 19/11/87.

Manderson, Boris A Field Manual in the Family (1st pub 1971)
Jordan. 272pp.; illus. £13.95 (paperback). 0 7132 2069 3.
10/11/87.

Robinson, Anne No Coming Back to Me Again
Edinburgh. 212pp.; illus. £12.95.
0 5520 005 9. 10/11/87.

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Watts, Marjorie; foreword by Francis King Mrs Sappho: The life of C. A. Dawson Scott, mother of International P.E.N.
Duckworth. 220pp.; illus. £12.95. 0 7156 2183 1. 7/11/87.

Ziegler, Philip The Diaries of Lord Louis Mountbatten 1920-1922: Tours with the Prince of Wales
Collins. 315pp.; illus. £15. 0 00 217608 4. 14/11/87.

Ziegler, Philip Melbourne: A biography of William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne (1st pub 1976)
Collins. 412pp.; illus. £9.95 (paperback). 0 00 217957 1.
5/11/87.

Business

Hilton, Anthony City within a State: A portrait of Britain's financial world
Tauris. 199pp. £14.95. 1 85043 044 6. 24/10/87.

Economics

Robinson, Fred, Colin Wren and John Goddard Economic Development Policies: An evaluative study of the Newcastle Metropolitan Region
Oxford: Clarendon. 146pp. £8.95 (paperback).
0 19 823271 3. 22/10/87.

Tipton, Frank B., and Robert Aldrich An Economic and Social History of Europe from 1939 to the Present
Macmillan. 297pp. £25 (hardcover). £7.95 (paperback).
0 333 42370 4 (hc). 0 333 42371 2 (pb). 4/11/87.

Watts, Marjorie; foreword by Francis King Mrs Sappho: The life of C. A. Dawson Scott, mother of International P.E.N.
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